

Quiet Rumours: an Anarcha-Feminist anthology

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## Introduction

The feminist movement that began in the late '60s developed its own organisational form and practice, at the heart of which lay the small group - for example for consciousness-raising - often composed of close friends. From a base of thousands of such groups grew the larger, international movement.

In its early years the feminist movement was notable for its absence of leaders (and led), its decentralism, its federalism - best witnessed in the thousands of magazines, newspapers and pamphlets that wove the movement together - its complete lack of dogma and its denial of any one ideology or line. Lastly, springing from all this, its overall emphasis upon a non-hierarchical movement. It must be pointed out that all these forms of organisation appeared spontaneously without any external direction or preconceived programme.

By the mid '70s most of these principles were in real danger of being forgotten as the movement became dominated by political ideologies, ideologies that some women regarded as essentially male, for example marxism and its many brands. Also the movement began to be directed towards mass and reformist campaigns which were often inherently hierarchical and centrist and of course intended to appeal to the ultimate expression of the patriarchy - the state.

For those feminists already aware of anarchist ideas the dangers of these developments were immediately clear and all too familiar. The anarcha-feminist critique gained popularity and was widely studied. The first English anarcha-feminist groups appeared in 1977 and soon grew to a national network with its own bulletins and newspaper, with two national and several regional conferences. Throughout this period the Black Bear group was busily publishing pamphlets on anarcha-feminism, all of which were extremely popular, going through several reprints and selling in their thousands.

But by 1980 the anarcha-feminist movement had to all intents and purposes ceased to function. It seems, looking back, rather shortlived. For one thing it faced opposition not only from marxist and reformist feminists but also from the traditional, and male-dominated, anarchist movement, which regarded anarcha-feminists as some kind of threat to its position. Partly because of all

this, anarcha-feminists moved away into other areas of activity, particularly the growing anti-nuclear movement.

However, a great demand still exists for the pamphlets first published by Black Bear and so they are now collected together for the first time in *Quiet Rumours*. Hopefully their reappearance will once again stimulate readers to consider and recognise the value of their arguments.

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# Anarcho-Feminism: Two Statements

## Who we are: An Anarcho-Feminist Manifesto

We consider Anarcho-Feminism to be the ultimate and necessary radical stance at this time in world history, far more radical than any form of Marxism.

We believe that a Woman's Revolutionary Movement must not mimic, but destroy, all vestiges of the male-dominated power structure, the State itself - with its whole ancient and dismal apparatus of jails, armies, and armed robbery (taxation); with all its murder; with all of its grotesque and repressive legislation and military attempts, internal and external, to interfere with people's private lives and freely-chosen co-operative ventures.

The world obviously cannot survive many more decades of rule by gangs of armed males calling themselves governments. The situation is insane, ridiculous and even suicidal. Whatever its varying forms of justifications, the armed State is what is threatening all of our lives at present. The State, by its inherent nature, is really incapable of reform. True socialism, peace and plenty for all, can be achieved only by people themselves, not by representatives ready and able to turn guns on all who do not comply, with State directives. As to how we proceed against the pathological State structure, perhaps the best word is to outgrow rather than overthrow. This process entails, among other things, a tremendous thrust of education and communication among all peoples. The intelligence of womankind has at last been brought to bear on such oppressive male inventions as the church and the legal family; it must now be brought to re-evaluate the ultimate stronghold of male domination, the State.

While we recognise important differences in the rival systems, our analysis of the evils of the State must extend to both its communist and capitalist versions.

We intend to put to the test the concept of freedom of expression, which we trust will be incorporated in the ideology of the coming Socialist Sisterhood which is destined to play a determining role in the future of the race, if there really is to be a future.

We are all socialists. We refuse to give up this pre-Marxist term which has been used as a synonym by many anarchist thinkers. Another synonym for anarchism is libertarian socialism, as opposed to Statist and authoritarian varieties. Anarchism (from the Greek *anarchos* - without ruler) is the affirmation of human freedom and dignity expressed in a negative, cautionary term signifying that no person should rule or dominate another person by force or threat of force. Anarchism indicates what people should not do to one another. Socialism, on the other hand, means all the groovy things people can do and build together, once they are able to combine efforts and resources on the basis of common interest, rationality and creativity.

We love our Marxist sisters and all our sisters everywhere, and have no interest in disassociating ourselves from their constructive struggles. However, we reserve the right to criticise their politics when we feel that they are obsolete or irrelevant or inimical to the welfare of womankind.

As Anarcho-Feminists, we aspire to have the courage to question and challenge absolutely everything - including, when it proves necessary, our own assumptions.

## Blood Of The Flower: An Anarchist-Feminist Statement

We are an independent collective of women who feel that anarchism is the logically consistent expression of feminism.

We believe that each woman is the only legitimate articulator of her own oppression. Any woman, regardless of previous political involvement knows only too intimately her own oppression, and hence, can and must define what form her liberation will take.

Why are many women sick and tired of 'movements'? Our answer is that the fault lies with the nature of movements, not with the individual women. Political movements, as we have known them, have separated our political

activities from our personal dreams of liberation, until either we are made to abandon our dreams as impossible or we are forced to drop out of the movement because we hold steadfastly to our dreams. As true anarchists and as true feminists, we say *dare to dream the impossible, and never settle for less than total translation of the impossible into reality.*

There have been two principle forms of action in the women's liberation movement. One has been the small, local, volitionally organised consciousness-raising group, which at best has been a very meaningful mode of dealing with oppression from a personal level and, at worst, never evolved beyond the level of a therapy group.

The other principle mode of participation has been large, bureaucratised groups which have focused their activities along specific policy lines, taking great pains to translate women's oppression into concrete, single-issue programmes. Women in this type of group often have been involved in formal leftist politics for some time, but could not stomach the sexism within other leftist groups. However, after reacting against the above-mentioned attitude of leftist males, many women with formal political orientations could not accept the validity of what they felt were the 'therapy groups' of their suburban sisters; yet they themselves still remained within the realm of male-originated Marxist-Leninist, Trotskyist, Maoist rhetoric, and continued to use forms of political organisation employed by the male leftist groups they were reacting against. The elitism and centralisation of the old male left thereby has found, and already poisoned parts of the women's movement with the attitude that political sophistication must mean 'building' a movement around single issue programmes, thereby implying that 'we must be patient until the masses' consciousness is raised to our level.' How condescending to assume that an oppressed person must be told that she is oppressed! How condescending to assume that her consciousness will grow only by plodding along, from single-issue to next single issue.

In the past decade or more, women of the left were consistently intimidated out of fighting for our own liberation, avoiding the obvious fact that all women are an oppressed group. We are so numerous and dispersed that we have identified ourselves erroneously as members of particular classes on the basis of the class of 'our men', our fathers or our husbands. So women of the left regarding ourselves as middle-class more than oppressed women, have been led to neglect engaging in our own struggle as our primary struggle. Instead, we have dedicated ourselves to fight on behalf of other oppressed peoples, thus alienating ourselves from our own plight. Many say that this attitude no longer exists in the women's movement, that it originated only from the guilt trip of the white middle class male, but even today women in autonomous women's

movements speak of the need to organise working class women, without concentrating on the need to organise ourselves - as if we were already beyond that level. This does not mean (if we insist first and foremost on freeing ourselves) that we love our oppressed sisters any the less; on the contrary, we feel that the best way for us to be true to all liberation struggles is to accept and deal directly with our own oppression.

## Why Anarchism?

We do not believe that rejection of Marxist-Leninist analysis and strategy is by definition political naiveté. We do not believe it is politically naive to maintain the attitude that even a 'democratically centralised' group could be considered the 'vanguard' spokeswoman for us. The nature of groups concerned with 'building' movements is: 1) to water down the 'more extreme' dreams into 'realistic' demands, and 2) to eventually become an organ of tyranny itself. No thanks!

There is another entire radical tradition which has run counter to Marxist-Leninist theory and practice through all of modern radical history - from Bakunin to Kropotkin to Sophie Perovskaya to Emma Goldman to Errico Malatesta to Murray Bookchin - and that is Anarchism. It is a tradition less familiar to most radicals because it has consistently been distorted and misrepresented by the more highly organised State organisations and Marxist-Leninist organisations.

Anarchism is not synonymous with irresponsibility and chaos. Indeed, it offers meaningful alternatives to the out-dated organisational and policy-making practices of the rest of the left. The basic anarchist form of organisation is a small group, voluntarily organised and maintained, which must work toward defining the oppression of its members and what form their struggle for liberation must take.

Organising women, in the New Left and Marxist left, is viewed as amassing troops for the Revolution. But we affirm that each woman joining in struggle is the Revolution. WE ARE THE REVOLUTION!

We must learn to act on impulse, to abandon the restrictions on behaviour that society has taught us to place on ourselves. The 'movement' has been, for most of us, a thing removed from ourselves. We must no longer think of ourselves as members of a movement, but as *individual* revolutionaries, co-operating. Two, three, five or ten such individual revolutionaries who know and trust each other intimately can carry out revolutionary acts and make our own policy. As members of a leaderless affinity group, each member participates on an equal level of power, thus negating the hierarchical function of power. DOWN WITH ALL BOSSES! Then we will not be lost in a movement where leadership determines for us the path the movement will take - we are our own movement, we determine our own movement's direction. We have refused to allow ourselves to be directed, spoken for, and eventually cooled off.

We do not believe, as some now affirm, that the splintering of the Women's Movement means the end to all of our revolutionary effectiveness. No! The spirit of the women is just too large to be guided and manipulated by 'a movement'. Small groups, acting on their own and deciding upon their own actions, are the logical expression of revolutionary women. This, of course, does not preclude various groups working together on various projects or conferences.

To these ends, and because we do not wish to be out of touch with other women, we have organised as an autonomous collective within the Women's Centre in Cambridge, Mass. The Women's Centre functions as a federation; that is, not as a policy-making group, but as a centre for various women's groups to meet. We will also continue to write statements like this one as we feel moved to. We would really like to hear from all and sundry!

ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION!

Red Rosia and Black Maria

Black Rose Anarcho-Feminists

A Note On The Text

**The Anarcho-Feminist Manifesto** was written by Chicago Anarcho-Feminists. **Blood of the Flower** was written by Red Rosia and Black Maria of



Black Rose Anarcho-Feminists, who in 1971 could be reached c/o The Women's Centre, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge Mass.

Both articles first appeared in *Siren - A Journal of Anarcho-Feminism* Vol 1 No 1 1971 (now defunct), published in Chicago.

They were next published together as a pamphlet by the Seattle section of the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation and the Revolutionary Anarchist Print Fund, c/o 4736 University Way NE, Seattle, Wn 98105.

# Feminism As Anarchism

Lynne Farrow

Feminism practices what Anarchism preaches. One might go as far as to claim feminists are the only existing protest groups that can honestly be called practising Anarchists; first because women apply themselves to specific projects like abortion clinics and day-care centres; second, because as essentially apolitical women for the most part refuse to engage in the political combat terms of the right or the left, reformism or revolution, respectively.

But women's concern for specific projects and their a-political activities constitute too great a threat to both the right and the left, and feminist history demonstrates how women have been lured away from their interests, co-opted on a legislative level by the established parties and co-opted on a theoretical level by the Left. This co-option has often kept us from asking exactly what is the Feminist situation? What's the best strategy for change?

The first impulse toward female liberation came in the 1840's when liberals were in the midst of a stormy abolition campaign. A number of eloquent Quaker women actively made speeches to liberate the slaveholding system of the South and soon realised that the basic rights they argued for Blacks were also denied women. Lucy Stone and Lucretia Mott, two of the braver women abolitionists, would occasionally tack some feminism ideas on the end of the abolition speeches, annoying to an unusual degree their fellow liberals. But the women were no threat so long as they knew their place and remembered which cause was the more serious.

Then in 1842 the World anti-slave convention was held in London and some American women crossed the Atlantic along with other Abolition delegates to find that not only were women denied a part in the proceedings, but worse, they were forced to sit behind a curtain. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cade Stanton, enraged at the hypocrisy of the liberal's anti-slavery gathering

denying women participation, then and there determined to return to America and organise on behalf of liberating women.

The first Women's Rights Convention was held at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, attracting with only three days' notice in a local newspaper a huge number of women filling the church in which they met. At the end of the very moving convention the gathering drew up a Declaration of Rights and Sentiments based on the Declaration of Independence only directed at men rather than England's King George. After this convention which is identified as the formal beginning of the Women's Rights Movement in America, feminism picked up quickly aiming at women's property laws and other grievances.

As American Feminism gathered a small measure of support, liberals became nervous that these women were spending energy on the woman issue rather than the real issue of the time: abolition. After all, they insisted, this is "the negroes' hour" and women shouldn't be so petty as to think of themselves at a time like this. When the Civil War became imminent this rhetoric grew from subtlety to righteous indignation. How could women be so unpatriotic as to devote themselves to feminism during a *national* crisis. Virtually every feminist in America suspended her feminist consciousness and gave support to the liberal interests at this point, assured that when the war was over and Blacks were given equal rights under the Constitution women would be included.

Susan B. Anthony, an ardent Abolitionist, was the only known feminist at the time that refused to buy the liberal's proposal. She continued appealing for the rights of women despite the gradual disintegration of her following who had been co-opted by the Abolitionists into joining their ranks. She insisted that both struggles could be run simultaneously and if they didn't women would be forgotten after the war. She was right. When the 14th Amendment was introduced in Congress after the war, not only were women omitted, they were specifically excluded. For the first time the word "male" was written into the Constitution making it clear that when it referred to a person that was the equivalent to male person.

This substantial blow to organised feminism hindered further legal advance for women. Then around 1913 when British women launched their militant tactics bombing buildings and starting fires, Alice Paul, an enthusiastic young American woman of Quaker stock, travelled to England to study and ended up working with the notorious Pankhursts. She returned to the States determined to rejuvenate the cause of suffrage and soon had persuaded the practically non-

functioning National Woman's Suffrage Association to re-open the federal campaign for suffrage in Washington.

In a very short time and due to nothing but her sheer genius for organising and strategy Alice Paul created a multifactional movement to be reckoned with. Her most effective tactic was picketing the White House with embarrassing placards denouncing President Wilson's authoritarian stand on Woman Suffrage while he preached democracy abroad. World War I approached steadily and the stage was again set for the feminists' co-option.

The pacifists appealed to the women to suspend their cause temporarily and join the peace effort while at the same time the majority, the war hawks, were scandalised that the women abandoned their country at a time like this. Again the women were co-opted as thousands left the feminist cause to go to the aid of their parties, but nevertheless a small efficient group, the National Woman's Party, stayed intact to fight suffrage through.

It is difficult to ascertain which side, the right or the left, has been more responsible for co-opting the feminist efforts at change. History assures us their methods have been identical and their unquestioning confidence in the priority of "the larger struggle" inevitably leads to a dismissal of feminist issues as tangential. The analysis of the current Black Movement and the Marxist dominated left squeezes women into their plans symptomatically, i.e. when the essential struggle is fought and won women then will come into their own. Women must wait. Women must help the *larger* cause.

The poetry of Black women identifies intensely with building the egos of the Black male in the conventional way egos are built, by self-depreciation. The theme heard over and over again tells of the Black woman's proud suffering at the hands of the Black man who has been emasculated by his white boss and so needs his woman to at least feel superior to. She does her part. Her suffering is a direct contribution to the Black (Male) struggle which she considers a noble sacrifice. (As Germaine Greer has suggested, since women have no power to threaten, they cannot be castrated and therefore no one sees their powerlessness as anything but natural and no one's going to lie down for women to kick.) Whereas the Black male's powerlessness is only temporary, since he is male and has the potential power of the white male. All he needs is a woman to dominate the way the white man has dominated him and his stature will be restored. Blacks have challenged white supremacy by realising Black is beautiful. They have yet to challenge the white family model, the

patriarchal family as something to be desired and therefore still uphold male supremacy.

Juliet Mitchell is a Marxist feminist whose ideas, as in *Woman's Estate*<sup>1</sup>, typifies the conceptual style of interpreting a group's very concrete grievances, like those of the feminists, as basically irrelevant to or symptomatic of the larger struggle where all groups participate in abstractions called ideologies. Predictably, if contradictions are found in the theory, Mitchell calls for an "overview", an abstraction that will enlarge itself to accommodate them. When interest groups such as students, women, Blacks or homosexuals formulate their priorities stemming directly from their situation, Mitchell accuses them of being helplessly short-sighted in refusing to see their needs as a symptom. What they need to understand, she continues, is the "totalism", the analysis to end all analyses.

The fully developed political consciousness of an exploited class or an oppressed group cannot come from within itself, but only from a knowledge of the interrelationships (and domination structures) of all the classes in society . . . This does not mean an immediate comprehension of the ways in which other groups and classes were exploited or oppressed, but it does mean what one could call a "totalist" attack on capitalism which can come to realise the need for solidarity with all other oppressed groups.

Mitchell might easily be accused of conceptual imperialism considering the "totalist" terms she uses serve to gobble up lesser terms reducing them to subsidiary categories under the authority of her original Marxist idea. According to Mitchell individual groups responding in their own way to their own interests must learn to see the way and sacrifice. Her idea that they must renounce their individual concern for the good of the total is an abstraction that has ceased to represent any interests at all, since it has come to be so large it cannot relate to diverse interests in any way.

The totalist position is a precondition for this realisation, but it must diversify its awareness or get stuck in the mud of Black chauvinism, which is the racial and cultural equivalent of working class economism, seeing no further than one's own badly out of joint nose.

Mitchell's ideas invalidate all forms of individualism in the same way the organised left and organised right have historically co-opted women from working in their own interests. Women are asked to be "totalist" in the same way citizens are asked to be "patriotic". We are being asked to switch one kind of paternalism for another. We are asked to comply with an hierarchical meta-analysis which we cannot assume with the even most remote faith has any connection with our immediate grievance. What is good for all is supposed to be good for one.

With the spectre of totalitarianism looming intimidating over us we are called upon to *justify* and rationalise the authenticity of our interests, i.e., stop *pursuing* our cause and be drawn into the diversionary web of *defending* it. We are so accustomed to thinking in terms of one group's interests being more significant, more basic, than another's that we are baited into self-rationalisation rather than question the value of pitting one group against another in the first place.

Not only does the "totalistic" approach make for much scrambling as to which cause is prior, it suggests that *when the nature of the problem is totalistic so then the solution must be*, which brings us to the place women have always been shafted. Groups may function under the illusion they are "all in it together" for just so long, usually as long as they are theorising, e.g., like the promises made to the feminists before the Civil War. When it comes to doing something specific about this abstractly designed situation, one cannot so easily search and destroy the totalistic enemy. Solutions, in short, necessarily imply specific choices to be made about what will be done first and for whom. Thus the cause most efficient at coercing the others will be given priority and the others will wait. Either that or the totalistic solution will be so diffuse as to mobilise energies that will help no one. Women lose either way when they see their struggle against sexism in the context of any larger struggle.

If the feminist struggle is not tangential or subsidiary to other political movements then how can it be characterised?

Because most women live or work with men for at least part of their lives they have a radically different approach from others to the problems they face with what would ordinarily be called "the oppressor." Since a woman generally has an interest in maintaining a relationship with men for personal or professional reasons the problem cannot only be reduced to or located with men. First, that would imply removal of them from the situation as a solution which is of course against her interests. Second, focusing on the source of the problem is not

necessarily the problem. It is a mistake to locate a conflict with certain people rather than the kind of *behaviour* that takes place between them.

It seems to follow then that women because of their interest in preserving a relationship with men must relate to their own condition in an entirely different, necessarily situationist basis. It follows that the energies of feminism will be problem-centred rather than people (or struggle) centred. The emphasis will not be directed at competing us-against-them style with mythological oppressor for certain privileges but rather an avoidance of any pitting of sides against each other. E.g., if a competitive situation already exists between the sexes, learning Karate will only reinforce the stockpiling of arms, on both sides; the terms of the struggle don't change the balance of power on both sides.

Feminism as situationism means that elaborate social analysis and first causes a la Marx would be superfluous because changes will be rooted in situations from which the problems stem; instead change will be idiosyncratic to the people, the time and the place. This approach has generally been seen as unpopular because we do not respect person to person problem-solving or are embarrassed by it or both. We characterise these concerns as petty if they cannot immediately seem to identify with any large scale interests or if those concerns cannot be universalised to a "symptom of some larger condition." Discussing "male chauvinism" is as fruitless as discussing "capitalism" in that, safely reduced to an explanation, we have efficiently distanced ourselves from a problem and the necessity to immediately interact with it or respond to other people. *Such theoretical over-articulation gives one the illusion of responding to a critical situation without ever really coming to grips with one's own participation in it.*

Originally the feminists were accused of not having one comprehensive theory but a lot of little gripes. This made for much amusement in the media because there was no broad-based theoretical connection made between things like married women taking their husband's names, inadequate day care facilities, the persistent use of 'girl' for woman and women wanting to work on equal basis with men. Rather than this diversity being seen as a strength it was seen as a weakness. Predictably a few Marxist feminists rose to the occasion, becoming apologists for the cause and made feminism theoretically respectable, centring women's problems around the 'ideology of reproduction' and other such vague notions.

Feminism has traditionally tried to find ad hoc solutions appropriate to needs at the time, i.e., centred around the family or community of friends. However, certain unscrupulous, legal, well-publicised (as well as theoretical) attempts have been made to bring women's liberation into the big time.

For example, some friends and I were recently involved in setting up a feminist conference on divorce. We found some speakers who would describe how to go about getting a divorce and some attorneys who would give free legal advice to women who wanted it. Various workshops were organised around topics that interested those involved or concerned with divorce. A huge number of women from the community came, attracted because of the problem-centred topic, women who would probably not have identified themselves with the mystifying concept of feminism. Everyone participated enthusiastically exchanging advice, phone numbers, lawyers names. Some women cried in the workshops, overwhelmed at the supportiveness of women in similar predicaments.

The conference was running smoothly when a speaker from the National Organisation for Women made a presentation of the official national position on divorce and the organisation's plans for the future. Included was a proposal that couples should be able to pass a test before they married so only qualified people could participate in this kind of legal arrangement. Presumably those who could not pass the test created by the law makers would be discouraged, thus preventing any future divorces.

Aside from the obvious fallacy of believing more laws will change what existing laws have created and thereby save people from themselves, the N.O.W. proposal exemplifies the attempt to solve the problem of women's liberation by high-handed monolithic means very similar to the Marxist Branka Magas' ambition of 'seizing the culture.' The impulse to coerce people by national laws is similar to the impulse to create a revolution to change the balance of power. Each kind of grand scale change will find reasons to service its own magnanimous authoritarianism. Moreover each side claims what's good for all is good for one and therefore any means can be used to advance the ambitions of the revolution, in model of the corporation.

These occasional large scale proposals lead people to believe such a thing a non-situationist Women's Liberation Movement exists, a veritable army clamouring in unison for national reforms. The media perpetuated it. But there is no feminist movement per se. Feminists have been too busy working at their community based projects within families, communes, working places, to focus on building an image or identity for themselves. Further, a single movement



image or principle would be counterproductive and have women constantly comparing their lives with the image, monitoring life styles and their work to see if it was in *compliance* with the MOVEMENT.'

The 'movement' at the same time has been criticised for not being cohesive and for not having a program. Exactly. That's the point. The diversity in which feminists implement and practice change is its strength. Feminism has no leaders in the lieutenant sense for the same reason. There is nothing to lead. We plan no revolution. Women are doing what they can where they can. We are not unified because women do not see themselves as one class struggling against another. We do not envision a women's liberation army mobilised against male tyranny. Solidarity for its own sake is the stuff governments are made of and adapting these methods only reinforces the perspective of us against them sex-class antagonism. Identifying with other strugglers in such paranoid fashion encourages brutal competition and keeps the contest going. What's more, stressing solidarity can only lead to a self-consciousness about what we are doing as personalities, thereby accentuating our individual differences and causing conflicts before we even begin to apply ourselves to the practical problems of sexism.

The National Organisation for Women notwithstanding, feminism begins at home and it generally doesn't go a whole lot further than the community.

Midwives and witches practising their herbals and healing arts figure prominently in our individualist tradition. Women in families passed on information on how to diagnose pregnancy, prevent conception, cure infections, stop bleeding, prevent cramping and alleviate pain. Quietly, sometimes mysteriously, women have ministered to children and friends without elaborating on the policy of it. Their effectiveness inspired awe and fear and risked ridicule but they did not stop to explain or mystify what they were doing, they merely did it. What mysterious description remains of midwife methods, a female lore passed along from mother to daughter, has been deprecated as 'old wives tales.'

The current feminist wave maintains this individualist tradition in that women's health problems have surfaced as the principle concern. Small projects have sprung up all over the country for the purpose of meeting local needs for adequate abortions, birth control, pregnancy-testing and general medical care. Previously women had limited facilities or had to rely on the paternalism of doctors. New women's groups discovered there are many routine examinations

and services that can be performed safely at little or no cost by women themselves.

Just such a group has organised around these interests at our local women's centre, providing various services, i.e., abortion referrals and information to the community on a daily basis, as the demands arise. Those involved see their function as community action problem solving, assessing the needs of women and coming up with the most efficient way of fleeing that problem with the resources available. Of course, there are things we've learned are within our ability to do and things we must refer. Pregnancy tests are done quite simply and for free by volunteers at the centre. Abortion cases are referred to a competent carefully checked out physician who charges a minimum fee. A list of the cheapest and best venereal disease clinics has been completed and distributed by flyers. The scope and ambition of our project is dictated entirely by the interests of the people nearby. We enthusiastically co-operate with other groups on the mutual exchange of information but have no intention of expanding. We have too much to do to create an analysis or policy, and we haven't the time to stop and observe what's going on.

## Where Do We Move From Here?

Where do we move from here? Feminists have always possessed an exuberant disregard for the 'why?' questions, the theoretical mainstay of our menfolk. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* for one was severely attacked by reviewers for spending all those pages *not* formulating a theory on why sexism existed. Our disinterest in theoretical speculation has been construed as a peculiar deficiency. Of course. Similarly our distrust for logic and that which has been unscrupulously passed off as the Known in the situation. We can't 'argue rationally' we are told and it probably is true that we avoid this kind of verbal jiggling. But the fact is we haven't any real stake in the game. KNOWLEDGE and ARGUMENT as it relates to women is so conspicuously alien to our interests that female irreverence for the intellectual arts is rarely concealed. In fact, women seem to regard male faith in these processes as a form of superstition because there appears no apparent connection between these arts and the maintenance of life, the principle female concern.

Women's occupation centres basically around survival processes, the gathering of resources, the feeding, clothing and sheltering of children and meeting the necessities of life on a day to day basis. Our energies must necessarily be applied to 'how to' questions rooted in our practical responsibilities. Observing and evaluating life routines must be the occupation of the comparatively idle,

those with less responsibilities, i.e., men. Similarly, an old joke points at the delusionary importance men invest their work with: the head of the family reports to his friends, "I make the big decisions in the family like whether Red China should be admitted to the UN and my wife makes the small ones like if we need a new car and what school the kids should go to."

Because women have no vested interest in theoretical assumptions and their implications and hence no practice in the arts of verbal domination they will not easily be drawn into its intricate mechanics. Instead, even young girl children, appraising their lot, acquire an almost automatic distrust (like Lucy of *Peanuts* fame) for the theoretical in the situation and rely on their wits and instincts of the moment to solve pressing practical problems. Women are suspicious of logic and its rituals the same way the poor are suspicious of our legal labyrinths. Veiled in mystification both institutions function against their interests.

The province of our interests, the ministering of practical needs as women, has been so seriously and consistently devalued that there is scarcely anything we do that is regarded as significant. Where our conversation is about people and problems it is perjoratively referred to as gossip; our work, because it is necessarily repetitive and home-centred, is not considered work, but when we ask for help with it is called nagging. When we won't argue logically it is the source of great amusement and it never occurs to anyone to ask us if we wanted to pursue such competitive fancy in the first place.

We must learn to see our so-called defects as advantages, as a problem-to-problem, person-to-person approach to Living rooted in the individual situation. We must learn to value other than the traditional ways of 'knowing' and instead smarten our senses and quicken our responses to the situations in which we find ourselves.

Feminism means finding new terms to deal with traditional situations, not traditional terms to deal with what has been called a new movement. It is a mistake for us to argue the validity of our cause; that would imply we wanted in. It would suggest there was a contest going on that we consented to enter, and there would be a dominating winner and a dominated loser.

Arguing a case for feminism is a form of appeal, like a powerless class asking for power or a PR enterprise attempting to sell something to a potential buyer.

Feminism means rejecting all the terms we are offered to gain legitimacy as a respectable social movement and redefining our real interests as we meet them. So when our disinterest in aggression is called 'passivity' and our avoidance of systematic organisation called 'naive', we must heartily agree. How else can you get anything done?

1. Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate*, Pantheon books, 1971, p. 23.

### A Note On The Text

Lynne Farrow's *Feminism As Anarchism* first appeared in 1974 as an article in *Aurora*, a New York feminist magazine.

# Anarchism: The Feminist Connection

## Peggy Kornegger

Eleven years ago, when I was in a small-town Illinois high school, I had never heard of the word "anarchism" - at all. The closest I came to it was knowing that anarchy meant "chaos". As for socialism and communism, my history classes somehow conveyed the message that there was no difference between them and fascism, a word that brought to mind Hitler, concentration camps, and all kinds of horrible things which never happened in a free country like ours. I was subtly being taught to swallow the bland pabulum of traditional American politics: moderation, compromise, fence-straddling, Chuck Percy as wonder boy. I learned the lesson well: it took me *years* to recognize the bias and distortion which had shaped my entire "education". The "his-story" of *mankind* (white) had meant just that; as a woman I was relegated to a vicarious existence. As an anarchist I had no existence at all. A whole chunk of the past (and thus possibilities for the future) had been kept from me. Only recently did I discover that many of my disconnected political impulses and inclinations shared a common framework - that is, the anarchist or libertarian tradition of thought. I was like suddenly seeing red after years of colourblind grays.

Emma Goldman furnished me with my first definition of anarchism:

*Anarchism, then really stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth, an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations.*<sup>1</sup>

Soon, I started making mental connections between anarchism and radical feminism. It became very important to me to write down some of the

perceptions in this area as a way of communicating to others the excitement I felt about anarcho-feminism. It seems crucial that we share our visions with one another in order to break down some of the barriers that misunderstanding and splinterism raise between us. Although I call myself an anarcho-feminist, this definition can easily include socialism, communism, cultural feminism, lesbian separatism, or any of a dozen other political labels. As Su Negrin writes: "No political umbrella can cover all my needs."<sup>2</sup> We may have more in common than we think we do. While I am writing here about my own reactions and perceptions, I don't see either my life or thoughts as separate from those of other women. In fact, one of my strongest convictions regarding the Women's Movement is that we *do* share an incredible commonality of vision. My own participation in this vision is not to offer definitive statements or rigid answers but rather possibilities and changeable connections which I hope will bounce around among us and contribute to a continual process of individual and collective growth and evolution/revolution.

## What Does Anarchism Really Mean?

Anarchism has been maligned and misinterpreted for so long that maybe the most important thing to begin with is an explanation of what it is and isn't. Probably the most prevalent stereotype of the anarchist is a malevolent-looking man hiding a lighted bomb beneath a black cape, ready to destroy or assassinate everything and everybody in his path. This image engenders fear and revulsion in most people, regardless of their politics; consequently, anarchism is dismissed as ugly, violent, and extreme. Another misconception is the anarchist as impractical idealist, dealing in useless, Utopian abstractions and out of touch with concrete reality. The result: anarchism is once again dismissed, this time as an "impossible dream".

Neither of these images is accurate (though there have been both anarchist assassins *and* idealists - as is the case in many political movements, left and right). What *is* accurate depends, of course, on one's frame of reference. There are different kinds of anarchist, just as there are different kinds of socialists. What I will talk about here is communist anarchism, which I see as virtually identical to libertarian (i.e. nonauthoritarian) socialism. Labels can be terribly confusing, so in hopes of clarifying the term, I'll define anarchism using three major principles (each of which I believe is related to a radical feminist analysis of society - more on that later):

(1) *Belief in the abolition of authority, hierarchy, government.* Anarchists call for the *dissolution* (rather than the seizure) of *power* - of human over human, of

state over community. Whereas many socialists call for a working class government and an eventual "withering away of the state", anarchists believe that the means create the ends, that a strong State becomes self-perpetuating. The only way to achieve anarchism (according to anarchist theory) is through the creation of co-operative, anti-authoritarian forms. To separate the process from the goals of revolution is to insure the perpetuation of oppressive structure and style.

(2) *Belief in both individuality and collectivity.* Individuality is not incompatible with communist thought. A distinction must be made though, between "rugged individualism", which fosters competition and a disregard for the needs of others, and true individuality, which implies freedom without infringement on others' freedom. Specifically, in terms of social and political organization, this meant balancing individual initiative with collective action through the creation of structures which enable decision-making to rest in the hands of all those in a group, community, or factory, not in the hands of "representatives" or "leaders". It means coordination and action via a non-hierarchical network (overlapping circles rather than a pyramid) of small groups or communities. (See descriptions of Spanish anarchist collectives in next section.) Finally, it means that successful revolution involves unmanipulated, autonomous individuals and groups working together to take "direct, unmediated control of society and of their own lives". <sup>3</sup>

(3) *Belief in both spontaneity and organization.* Anarchists have long been accused of advocating chaos. Most people in fact believe that anarchism is a synonym for disorder, confusion, violence. This is a total misrepresentation of what anarchism stands for. Anarchists don't deny the necessity of organization; they only claim that it must come from below, not above, from within rather than from without. Externally imposed structure or rigid rules which foster manipulation and passivity are the most dangerous forms a socialist "revolution" can take. No one can dictate the exact shape of the future. Spontaneous action within the context of a specific situation is necessary if we are going to create a society which responds to the changing needs of individuals and groups. Anarchists believe in fluid forms: small-scale participatory democracy in conjunction with large-scale collective cooperation and coordination (without loss of individual initiative).

So anarchism sounds great, but how could it possibly work? That kind of Utopian romanticism couldn't have any relation to the real world... right? Wrong. Anarchists have actually been successful (if only temporarily) in a number of instances (none of which is very well known). Spain and France, in particular, have long histories of anarchist activity, and it was in these two

countries that I found the most exciting concretisations of theoretical anarchism.

## Beyond Theory—Spain 1936-39, France 1968

*The revolution is a thing of the people, a popular creation; the counter-revolution is a thing of the State. It has always been so, and must always be so, whether in Russia, Spain, or China.*<sup>4</sup>  
Anarchist Federation of Iberia (FAI), *Tierra y Libertad*, July 3, 1936

The so-called Spanish Civil War is popularly believed to have been a simple battle between Franco's fascist forces and those committed to liberal democracy. What has been overlooked, or ignored, is that much more was happening in Spain than civil war. A broadly-based social revolution adhering to anarchist principles was taking firm, concrete form in many areas of the country. The gradual curtailment and eventual destruction of this libertarian movement is less important to discuss here than what was actually achieved by the women and men who were part of it. Against tremendous odds, they made anarchism work.

The realization of anarchist collectivisation and workers' self-management during the Spanish Revolution provides a classic example of organization-plus-spontaneity. In both rural and industrial Spain, anarchism had been a part of the popular consciousness for many years. In the countryside, the people had a long tradition of communalism; many villages still shared common property or gave plots of land to those without any. Decades of rural collectivism and cooperation laid the foundation for theoretical anarchism, which came to Spain in the 1870s (via the Italian revolutionary, Fanelli, a friend of Bakunin) and eventually gave rise to anarco-syndicalism, the application of anarchist principles to industrial trade unionism. the *Confederacion National del Trabajo*, founded in 1910, was the anarco-syndicalist union (working closely with the militant *Federacion Anarquista Iberica*) which provided instruction and preparation for workers' self-management and collectivization. Tens of thousands of books, newspapers, and pamphlets reaching almost every part of Spain contributed to an even greater general knowledge of anarchist thought<sup>5</sup>. The anarchist principles of non-hierarchical cooperation and individual initiative combined with anarco-syndicalist tactics of sabotage, boycott and general strike, and training in production and economics, gave the workers *background* in both theory and practice. This led to a successful *spontaneous* appropriation of both factories and land after July 1936.



When the Spanish right responded to the electoral victory of the Popular Front with an attempted military takeover, on July 19, 1936, the people fought back with a fury which checked the coup within 24 hours. At this point, ballot box success became incidental; total social revolution had begun. While the industrial workers either went on strike or actually began to run the factories themselves, the agricultural workers ignored landlords and started to cultivate the land on their own. Within a short time, over 60% of the land in Spain was worked collectively - without landlords, bosses, or competitive incentive. Industrial collectivization took place mainly in the province of Catalonia, where anarco-syndicalist influence was strongest. Since 75% of Spain's industry was located in Catalonia, this was no small achievement<sup>6</sup>. So, after 75 years of preparation and struggle, collectivization was achieved, through the spontaneous collective action of individuals dedicated to libertarian principles.

What, though, did collectivization actually mean, and how did it work? In general, the anarchist collectives functioned on two levels: (1) small-scale participatory democracy and (2) large-scale coordination with control at the bottom. At each level, the main concern was decentralization and individual initiative. In the factories and villages, representatives were chosen to councils which operated as administrative or coordinating bodies. Decisions always came from more general membership meetings, which all workers attended. To guard against the dangers of representation, representatives were workers themselves, and at all times subject to immediate, as well as periodic, replacement. These councils or committees were the basic units of self-management. From there, they could be expanded by further coordination into loose federations which would link together workers and operations over an entire industry or geographical area. In this way, distribution and sharing of goods could be performed, as well as implementation of programs of wide-spread concern, such as irrigation, transportation, and communication. Once again, the emphasis was on the bottom-to-top process. This very tricky balance between individuality and collectivism was most successfully accomplished by the Peasant Federation of Levant, which included 900 collectives, and the Aragon Federation of Collectives, composed of about 500 collectives.

Probably the most important aspect of self-management was the equalization of wages. This took many forms, but frequently the "family wage" system was used, wages being paid to each worker in money or coupons according to her/his needs and those of dependants. Goods in abundance were distributed freely, while others were obtainable with "money".

The benefits which came from wage equalization were tremendous. After huge profits in the hands of a few men were eliminated, the excess money was used both to modernize industry (purchase of new equipment, better working conditions) and to improve the land (irrigation, dams, purchase of tractors, etc.). Not only were better products turned out more efficiently, but consumer prices were lowered as well. This was true in such varied industries as: textiles, metal and munitions, gas, water, electricity, baking, fishing, municipal transportation, railroads, telephone services, optical products, health services, etc. The workers themselves benefited from a shortened work week, better working conditions, free health care, unemployment pay, and a new pride in their work. Creativity was fostered by self-management and the spirit of mutual aid; workers were concerned with turning out products which were better than those turned out under conditions of labour exploitation. They wanted to demonstrate that socialism works, that competition and greed motives are unnecessary. Within months, the standard of living had been raised by anywhere from 50-100% in many areas of Spain.

The achievements of the Spanish anarchists go beyond a higher standard of living and economic equality; they involve the realization of basic human ideals: freedom, individual creativity, and collective cooperation. The Spanish anarchist collectives did not fail; they were destroyed from without. Those (of the right and left) who believed in a strong State worked to wipe them out - of Spain and history. The successful anarchism of roughly eight million Spanish people is only now beginning to be uncovered.

*C'est pour toi que tu fais la revolution<sup>7</sup>.*

[It is for yourself that you make the revolution.]

Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit

Anarchism has played an important part in French history, but rather than delve into the past, I want to focus on a contemporary event-May-June, 1968. The May-June events have particular significance because they proved that a general strike and takeover of the factories by the workers, and the universities by the students, could happen in a modern, capitalistic, consumption-oriented country. In addition, the issues raised by the students and workers in France (e.g. self-determination, the quality of life) cut across class lines and have tremendous implications for the possibility of revolutionary change in a post-scarcity society<sup>8</sup>.

On March 22, 1968, students at the University of Nanterre, among them anarchist Daniel Cohn-Bendit, occupied administrative buildings at their school, calling for an end to both the Vietnam war and their own oppression as students. (Their demands were similar in content to those of students from Columbia to Berlin protesting *in loco parentis*.) The University was closed down, and the demonstrations spread to the Sorbonne. The SNESUP (the union of secondary school and university teachers) called for a strike, and the students' union, the UNEF, organized a demonstration for May 6. That day, students and police clashed in the Latin Quarter in Paris; the demonstrators built barricades in the streets, and many were brutally beaten by the riot police. By the 7th, the number of protesters had grown to between twenty and fifty thousand people, marching toward the Etoile singing the Internationale. During the next few days, skirmishes between demonstrators and police in the Latin Quarter became increasingly violent, and the public was generally outraged at the police repression. Talks between labour unions and teachers' and students' unions began, and the UNEF and the FEN (a teachers' union) called for an unlimited strike and demonstration. On May 13, around six hundred thousand people - students, teachers, and workers - marched through Paris in protest.

On the same day, the workers at the Sud-Aviation plant in Nantes (a city with the strongest anarco-syndicalist tendencies in France<sup>9</sup>) went out on strike. It was this action that touched off the general strike, the largest in history, including ten million workers - "professionals and labourers, intellectuals and football players."<sup>10</sup> Banks, post offices, gas stations, and department stores closed; the subway and busses stopped running; and trash piled up as the garbage collectors joined the strike. The Sorbonne was occupied by students, teachers, and anyone who wanted to come and participate in discussions there. Political dialogues which questioned the very basis of French capitalist society went on for days. All over Paris posters and graffiti appeared: *It is forbidden to forbid. Life without dead times. All power to the Imagination. The more you consume, the less you live.* May-June became both an "assault on the established order" and a "festival of the streets".<sup>11</sup> Old lines between the middle and working classes often became meaningless as the younger workers and the students found themselves making similar demands: liberation from an oppressive authoritarian system (university or factory) and the right to make decisions about their own lives.

The people of France stood at the brink of total revolution. A general strike had paralysed the country. The students occupied the universities and the workers, the factories. What remained to be done was for the workers actually to *work* the factories, to take direct unmediated action and settle for nothing less than total self-management. Unfortunately, this did not occur. Authoritarian politics and bureaucratic methods die hard, and most of the major French workers' unions were saddled with both. As in Spain, the Communist Party worked

against the direct, spontaneous actions of the people in the streets: the Revolution must be dictated from above. Leaders of the CGT (the Communist workers' union) tried to prevent contacts between the students and workers, and a united left soon became an impossibility. As de Gaulle and the police mobilized their forces and even greater violence broke out, many strikers accepted limited demands (better pay, shorter hours, etc.) and returned to work. Students continued their increasingly bloody confrontations with police, but the moment had passed. By the end of June, France had returned to "normality" under the same old Gaullist regime.

What happened in France in 1968 is vitally connected to the Spanish Revolution of 1936; in both cases anarchist principles were not only discussed but implemented. The fact that the French workers never did achieve working self-management may be because anarco-syndicalism was not as prevalent in France in the years prior to 1968 as it was in Spain before 1936. Of course, this is an over-simplification; explanation for a "failed" revolution can run on into infinity. What is crucial here, once again, is the fact that it happened at all. May-June, 1968, disproves the common belief that revolution is impossible in an advanced capitalist country. The children of the French middle and working classes, bred to passivity, mindless consumerism, and/or alienated labor, were rejecting much more than capitalism. They were questioning authority itself, demanding the right to a free and *meaningful* existence. The reasons for revolution in modern industrial society are thus no longer limited to hunger and material scarcity; they include the desire for human liberation from all forms of domination, in essence a radical change in the very "quality of everyday life".<sup>12</sup> They assume the necessity of a libertarian society. Anarchism can no longer be considered an anachronism.

*It is often said that anarchists live in a world of dreams to come and do not see things which happen today. We see them only too well, and in their true colors, and that is what makes us carry the hatchet into the forest of prejudices that besets us*<sup>13</sup>. Peter Kropotkin

There are two main reasons why revolution was aborted in France: (1) inadequate preparation in the theory and practice of anarchism and (2) the vast power of the State coupled with authoritarianism and bureaucracy in potentially sympathetic left-wing groups. In Spain, the revolution was more widespread and tenacious because of the extensive preparation. Yet it was still eventually crushed by a fascist State and authoritarian leftists. It is important to consider these two factors in relation to the situation in the United States today. We are not only facing a powerful State whose armed forces, police, and nuclear weapons could instantly destroy the entire human race, but we also

find ourselves confronting a pervasive reverence for authority and hierarchical forms whose continuance is ensured daily through the kind of home-grown passivity bred by family, school, church, and TV screen. In addition, the U.S. is a huge country, with only a small, sporadic history of anarchist activity. It would seem that not only are we unprepared, we are literally dwarfed by a State more powerful than those of France and Spain combined. To say we are up against tremendous odds is an understatement.

But where does defining the Enemy as a ruthless, unconquerable giant lead us? If we don't allow ourselves to be paralysed by fatalism and futility, it could force us to redefine revolution in a way that would focus on anarcho-feminism as the framework in which to view the struggle for human liberation. It is women who now hold the key to new conceptions of revolution, women who realize that revolution can no longer mean the seizure of power or the domination of one group by another-under *any* circumstances, for *any* length of time. It is domination itself that must be abolished. The very survival of the planet depends on it. Men can no longer be allowed to wantonly manipulate the environment for their own self-interest, just as they can no longer be allowed to systematically destroy whole races of human beings. The presence of hierarchy and authoritarian mind-set threaten out human and planetary existence. Global liberation and libertarian politics have become *necessary*, not just utopian pipe dreams. We must "acquire the conditions of life in order to survive". <sup>14</sup>

To focus on anarcho-feminism as the necessary revolutionary framework for our struggle is not to deny the immensity of the task before us. We do see "only too well" the root causes of our oppression and the tremendous power of the Enemy. But we also see that the way out of the deadly historical cycle of incomplete or aborted revolutions requires of us new definitions and new tactics - ones which point to the kind of "hollowing out"<sup>15</sup> process described later in the "Making Utopia Real" section. As women, we are particularly well-suited for participation in this process. Underground for ages, we have learned to be covert, subtle, sly, silent, tenacious, acutely sensitive, and expert at communication skills.

For our own survival, we learned to weave webs of rebellion which were invisible to the "masterful" eye.

*We know what a boot looks like  
when seen from underneath,  
we know the philosophy of boots...*

*Soon we will invade like weeds,  
everywhere but slowly;  
the captive plants will rebel  
with us, fences will topple,  
brick walls ripple and fall,*

*there will be no more boots.  
Meanwhile we eat dirt  
and sleep; we are waiting  
under your feet.*

*When we say Attack  
you will hear nothing  
at first.*<sup>16</sup>

Anarchistic preparat

ion is not non-existent in this country. It exists in the minds and actions of women readying themselves (often unknowingly) for a revolution whose forms will shatter historical inevitability and the very process of history itself.

## Anarchism and the Women's Movement

*The development of sisterhood is a unique threat, for it is directed against the basic social and psychic model of hierarchy and domination...*<sup>17</sup>

Mary Daly

*All across the country, independent groups of women began functioning without the structure, leaders, and other factotums of the male left, creating independently and simultaneously, organizations similar to those of anarchists of many decades and locales. No accident, either.*<sup>18</sup>

Cathy Levine

I have not touched upon the matter of woman's role in Spain and France, as it can be summed up in one word - unchanged. Anarchist men have been little better than males everywhere in their subjection of women.<sup>19</sup> Thus the absolute necessity of a feminist anarchist revolution. Otherwise the very principles on which anarchism is based become utter hypocrisy.

The current women's movement and a radical feminist analysis of society have contributed much to libertarian thought. In fact, it is my contention that feminists have been unconscious anarchists in both theory and practice for years. We now need to become *consciously* aware of the connections between anarchism and feminism and use that framework for our thoughts and actions. We have to be able to see very clearly where we want to go and how to get there. In order to be more effective, in order to create the future we sense is possible, we must realise that what we want is not change but total *transformation*.

The radical feminist perspective is almost pure anarchism. The basic theory postulates the nuclear family as the basis for all authoritarian systems. The lesson the child learns, from father to teacher to boss to God, is to OBEY the great anonymous voice of Authority. To graduate from childhood to adulthood is to become a full-fledged automaton, incapable of questioning or even thinking clearly. We pass into middle-America, believing everything we are told and numbly accepting the destruction of life all around us.

What feminists are dealing with is a mind-fucking process—the male domineering attitude toward the external world, allowing only subject/object relationships. Traditional male politics reduces humans to object status and then dominates and manipulates them for abstract "goals". Women, on the other hand, are trying to develop a consciousness of "Other" in all areas. We see subject-to-subject relationships as not only desirable but necessary. (Many of us have chosen to work with and love only women for just this reason—those kinds of relationships are so much more possible.) Together we are working to expand our empathy and understanding of other living things and to identify with those entities outside of ourselves, rather than objectifying and manipulating them. At this point, a respect for all life is a prerequisite for our very survival.

Radical feminist theory also criticizes male hierarchical thought patterns - in which rationality dominates sensuality, mind dominates intuition, and persistent splits and polarities (active/passive, child/adult, sane/insane, work/play, spontaneity/organization) alienate us from the mind-body experience as a *Whole* and from the *Continuum* of human experience. Women are attempting to get rid of these splits, to live in harmony with the universe as whole, integrated humans dedicated to the collective healing of our individual wounds and schisms.

In actual practice within the Women's Movement, feminists have had both success and failure in abolishing hierarchy and domination. I believe that women frequently speak and act as "intuitive" anarchists, that is, we *approach*, or *verge on*, a complete denial of all patriarchal thought and organization. That approach, however, is blocked by the powerful and insidious forms which patriarchy takes-in our minds and in our relationships with one another. Living within and being conditioned by an authoritarian society often prevents us from making that all-important connection between feminism and anarchism. When we say we are fighting the patriarchy, it isn't always clear to all of us that that means fighting *all* hierarchy, *all* leadership, *all* government, and the very idea of authority itself. Our impulses toward collective work and small leaderless groups have been anarchistic, but in most cases we haven't *called* them by that name. And that is important, because an understanding of feminism as anarchism could springboard women out of reformism and stop-gap measures into a revolutionary confrontation with the basic nature of authoritarian politics.

If we want to "bring down the patriarchy", we need to talk about anarchism, to know exactly what it means, and to use that framework to transform ourselves and the structure of our daily lives. Feminism doesn't mean female corporate power or a woman President; it means *no* corporate power and *no* Presidents. The Equal Rights Amendment will not transform society; it only gives women the "right" to plug into a hierarchical economy. Challenging sexism means challenging *all* hierarchy-economic, political, and personal. And that means an anarca-feminist revolution.

Specifically, when have feminists been anarchistic, and when have we stopped short? As the second wave of feminism spread across the country in the late 60s, the forms which women's groups took frequently reflected an unspoken libertarian consciousness. In rebellion against the competitive power games, impersonal hierarchy, and mass organization tactics of male politics, women broke off into small, leaderless, consciousness-raising groups, which dealt with personal issues in our daily lives. Face-to-face, we attempted to get at the root cause of our oppression by sharing our hitherto unvalued perceptions and experiences. We learned from each other that politics is not "out there" but in our minds and bodies and between individuals. Personal relationships could and did oppress us as a political class. Our misery and self-hatred were a direct result of male domination-in home, street, job, and political organization.

So, in many unconnected areas of the U.S., C-R groups developed as a spontaneous, direct (re)action to patriarchal forms. The emphasis on the small group as a basic organizational unit, on the personal and political, on anti-authoritarianism, and on spontaneous direct action was essentially anarchistic.



But, where were the years and years of preparation which sparked the Spanish revolutionary activities? The structure of women's groups bore a striking resemblance to that of anarchist affinity groups within anarco-syndicalist unions in Spain, France, and many other countries. Yet, we had not called ourselves anarchists and consciously organized around anarchist principles. At the time, we did not even have an underground network of communication and idea-and-skill sharing. Before the women's movement was more than a handful of isolated groups groping in the dark toward answers, anarchism as an unspecified ideal existed in our minds.

I believe that this puts women in the unique position of being the bearers of a subsurface anarchist consciousness which, if articulated and concretized can take us further than any previous group toward the achievement of total revolution. Women's intuitive anarchism, if sharpened and clarified, is an incredible leap forward (or beyond) in the struggle for human liberation. Radical feminist theory hails feminism as the Ultimate Revolution. This is true if, and only if, we recognize and claim our anarchist roots. At the point where we fail to see the feminist connection to anarchism, we stop short of revolution and become trapped in "ye olde male political rut". It is time to stop groping in the darkness and see what we have done and are doing in the context of where we want to ultimately be.

C-R groups were a good beginning, but they often got so bogged down in talking about personal problems that they failed to make the jump to direct action and political confrontation. Groups that did organize around a specific issue or project sometimes found that the "tyranny of structurelessness" could be as destructive as the "tyranny of tyranny"<sup>20</sup> The failure to blend organization with spontaneity frequently caused the emergence of those with more skills or personal charisma as leaders. The resentment and frustration felt by those who found themselves following sparked in-fighting, guilt-tripping, and power struggles. Too often this ended in either total ineffectiveness or a backlash adherence to "what we need is more structure" (in the old male up/down sense of the word).

Once again, I think that what was missing was a verbalized anarchist analysis. Organization does not have to stifle spontaneity or follow hierarchical patterns. The women's groups or projects which have been the most successful are those which experimented with various fluid structures: the rotation of tasks and chair- persons, sharing of all skills, equal access to information and resources, non-monopolized decision-making, and time slots for discussion of group dynamics. This latter structural element is important because it involves a continued effort on the part of group members to watch for "creeping power politics". If women are verbally committing themselves to collective work, this

requires a real struggle to unlearn passivity (to eliminate "followers") and to share special skills or knowledge (to avoid "leaders"). This doesn't mean that we cannot be inspired by one another's words and lives; strong actions by strong individuals can be contagious and thus important. But we must be careful not to slip into old behavior patterns.

On the positive side, the emerging structure of the women's movement in the last few years has generally followed an anarchistic pattern of small project-oriented groups continually weaving an underground network of communication and collective action around specific issues. Partial success at leader/"star" avoidance and the diffusion of small action projects (Rape Crisis Centers, Women's Health Collectives) across the country have made it extremely difficult for the women's movement to be pinned down to one person or group. Feminism is a many-headed monster which cannot be destroyed by singular decapitation. We spread and grow in ways that are incomprehensible to a hierarchical mentality.

This is not, however, to underestimate the immense power of the Enemy. The most treacherous form this power can take is cooptation, which feeds on any short-sighted unanarchistic view of feminism as mere "social change". To think of sexism as an evil which can be eradicated by female participation in the way things are is to insure the continuation of domination and oppression. "Feminist" capitalism is a contradiction in terms. When we establish women's credit unions, restaurants, bookstores, etc., we must be clear that we are doing so for our own survival, for the purpose of creating a counter-system whose processes contradict and challenge competition, profit-making, and all forms of economic oppression. We must be committed to "living on the boundaries"<sup>21</sup>, to anti-capitalist, non-consumption values. What we want is neither integration nor a coup d'etat which would "transfer power from one set of boys to another set of boys".<sup>22</sup> What we ask is nothing less than total revolution, revolution whose forms invent a future untainted by inequity, domination, or disrespect for individual variation - in short, feminist-anarchist revolution. I believe that women have known all along how to move in the direction of human liberation; we only need to shake off lingering male political forms and dictums and focus on our own anarchistic female analysis.

## Where Do We Go From Here? Making Utopia Real

*"Ah, your vision is romantic bullshit, sappy religiosity, flimsy idealism." "You're into poetry because you can't deliver concrete details." So says the little voice in the back of my (your?) head. But*

*the front of my head knows that if you were here next to me, we could talk. And that in our talk would come (concrete, detailed) descriptions of how such and such might happen, how this or that would be resolved. What my vision really lacks is concrete, detailed human bodies. Then it wouldn't be a flimsy vision, it would be a fleshy reality.*<sup>23</sup>

Su Negrin

*Instead of getting discouraged and isolated now, we should be in our small groups—discussing, planning, creating, and making trouble... we should always be actively engaging in and creating feminist activity, because we all thrive on it; in the absence of [it], women take tranquilizers, go insane, and commit suicide.*<sup>24</sup>

Cathy Levin

Those of us who lived through the excitement of sit-ins, marches, student strikes, demonstrations, and REVOLUTION NOW in the 60s may find ourselves disillusioned and downright cynical about anything happening in the 70s. Giving up or in ("open" marriage? hip capitalism? the Guru Maharaji?) seems easier than facing the prospect of decades of struggle and maybe even ultimate failure. At this point, we lack an overall framework to see the process of revolution in. Without it, we are doomed to deadended, isolated struggle or the individual solution. The kind of framework, or coming-together-point, that anarcho-feminism provides would appear to be a prerequisite for any sustained effort to reach Utopian goals. By looking at Spain and France, we can see that true revolution is "neither an accidental happening nor a coup d'etat artificially engineered from above."<sup>25</sup> It takes years of preparation: sharing of ideas and information, changes in consciousness and behavior, and the creation of political and economic alternatives to capitalist, hierarchical structures. It takes spontaneous direct action on the part of autonomous individuals through collective political confrontation. It is important to "free your mind" and your personal life, but it is not sufficient. Liberation is not an insular experience; it occurs in conjunction with other human beings. There are no individual "liberated women".

So, what I'm talking about is a *long-term process*, a series of actions in which we unlearn passivity and learn to take control over our own lives. I am talking about a "hollowing out" of the present system through the formation of mental and physical (concrete) alternatives to the way things are. The romantic image of a small band of armed guerrillas overthrowing the U.S. government is obsolete (as is all male politics) and basically irrelevant to this conception of

revolution. We would be squashed if we tried it. Besides, as the poster says, "What we want is not the overthrow of the government, but a situation in which it gets lost in the shuffle." This is what happened (temporarily) in Spain, and almost happened in France. Whether armed resistance will be necessary at some point is open to debate. The anarchist principle of "means create ends" seems to imply pacifism, but the power of the State is so great that it is difficult to be absolute about non-violence. (Armed resistance was crucial in the Spanish Revolution, and seemed important in France 1968 as well.) The question of pacifism, however, would entail another discussion, and what I'm concerned with here is emphasizing the preparation needed to transform society, a preparation which includes an anarca-feminist framework, long-range revolutionary patience, and continual active confrontation with entrenched patriarchal attitudes.

The actual tactics of preparation are things that we have been involved with for a long time. We need to continue and develop them further. I see them as functioning on three levels: (1) "educational" (sharing of ideas, experiences), (2) economic/political, and (3) personal/political.

"Education" has a rather condescending ring to it, but I don't mean "bringing the word to the masses" or guilt-tripping individuals into prescribed ways of being. I'm talking about the many methods we have developed for sharing our lives with one another—from writing (our network of feminist publications), study groups, and women's radio and TV shows to demonstrations, marches, and street theatre. The mass media would seem to be a particularly important area for revolutionary communication and influence—just think of how our own lives were *mis*-shaped by radio and TV<sup>26</sup>. Seen in isolation, these things might seem ineffectual, but people *do* change from writing, reading, talking, and listening to each other, as well as from active participation in political movements. Going out into the streets together shatters passivity and creates a spirit of communal effort and life energy which can help sustain *and* transform us. My own transformation from all-american-girl to anarca-feminist was brought about by a decade of reading, discussion, and involvement with many kinds of people and politics—from the Midwest to the West and East Coasts. My experiences may in some ways be unique, but they are not, I think, extraordinary. In many, many places in this country, people are slowly beginning to question the way they were conditioned to acceptance and passivity. God and Government are not the ultimate authorities they once were. This is not to minimize the extent of the power of Church and State, but rather to emphasize that seemingly inconsequential changes in thought and behavior, when solidified in collective action, constitute a real challenge to the patriarchy.

Economic/political tactics fall into the realm of direct action and "purposeful illegality" (Daniel Guerin's term). Anarco-syndicalism specifies three major modes of direct action: sabotage, strike, and boycott. Sabotage means "obstructing by every possible method, the regular process of production"<sup>27</sup>. More and more frequently, sabotage is practised by people unconsciously influenced by changing societal values. For example, systematic absenteeism is carried out by both blue and white collar workers. Defying employers can be done as subtly as the "slow-down" or as blatantly as the "fuck-up". Doing as little work as possible as slowly as possible is common employee practice, as is messing up the actual work process (often as a union tactic during a strike). Witness habitual misfiling or loss of "important papers" by secretaries, or the continual switching of destination placards on trains during the 1967 railroad strike in Italy.

Sabotage tactics can be used to make strikes much more effective. The strike itself is the workers' most important weapon. Any individual strike has the potential of paralysing the system if it spreads to other industries and becomes a general strike. Total social revolution is then only a step away. Of course, the general strike must have as its ultimate goal worker's self-management (as well as a clear sense of how to achieve and hold on to it), or else the revolution will be still-born (as in France, 1968).

The boycott can also be a powerful strike or union strategy (e.g., the boycott of non-union grapes, lettuce, and wines, and of Farah pants). In addition, it can be used to force economic and social changes. Refusal to vote, to pay war taxes, or to participate in capitalist competition and over-consumption are all important actions when coupled with support of alternative, non-profit structures (food co-ops, health and law collectives, recycled clothing and book stores, free schools, etc.). Consumerism is one of the main strongholds of capitalism. To boycott buying itself (especially products geared to obsolescence and those offensively advertised) is a tactic that has the power to change the "quality of everyday life". Refusal to vote is often practised out of despair or passivity rather than as a conscious political statement against a pseudo-democracy where power and money elect a political elite. Non-voting can mean something other than silent consent if we are simultaneously participating in the creation of genuine democratic forms in an alternative network of anarchist affinity groups.

This takes us to the third area—personal/political, which is of course vitally connected to the other two. The anarchist affinity group has long been a revolutionary organizational structure. In anarco-syndicalist unions, they functioned as training grounds for workers' self-management. They can be temporary groupings of individuals for a specific short-term goal, more

"permanent" work collectives (as an alternative to professionalism and career elitism), or living collectives where individuals learn how to rid themselves of domination or possessiveness in their one-to-one relationships. Potentially, anarchist affinity groups are the base on which we can build a new libertarian, non-hierarchical society. The way we live and work changes the way we think and perceive (and vice versa), and when changes in consciousness become changes in action and behavior, the revolution has begun.

Making Utopia real involves many levels of struggle. In addition to specific tactics which can be constantly developed and changed, we need political tenacity: the strength and ability to see beyond the present to a joyous, revolutionary future. To get from here to there requires more than a leap of faith. It demands of each of us a day-to-day, long-range commitment to possibility and direct action.

## The Transformation of the Future

*The creation of female culture is as pervasive a process as we can imagine, for it is participation in a VISION which is continually unfolding anew in everything from our talks with friends, to meat boycotts, to taking over storefronts for child care centres, to making love with a sister. It is revelatory, undefinable, except as a process of change. Women's culture is all of us exorcising, naming, creating toward the vision of harmony with ourselves, each other, and our sister earth. In the last ten years our having come faster and closer than ever before in the history of the patriarchy to overturning its power... is cause of exhilarant hope—wild, contagious, unconquerable, crazy HOPE!... The hope, the winning of life over death, despair and meaninglessness is everywhere I look now—like taliswomen of the faith in WOMANVISION...<sup>28</sup>*

Laurel

I used to think that if the revolution didn't happen tomorrow, we would all be doomed to a catastrophic (or at least, catatonic) fate. I don't believe anymore that kind of before-and-after revolution, and I think we set ourselves up for failure and despair by thinking of it in those terms. I *do* believe that what we all need, what we absolutely require, in order to continue struggling (in spite of oppression of our daily lives) is HOPE, that is, a vision of the future so beautiful and so powerful that it pulls us steadily forward in a bottom-up creation of an inner and outer world both habitable and self-fulfilling for *all*<sup>\*</sup>. I believe that



hope exists—that it is in Laurel's "womanvision", in Mary Daly's "existential courage"<sup>29</sup> and in anarcho-feminism. Our different voices describe the same dream, and "only the dream can shatter stone that blocks our mouths."<sup>30</sup> As we speak, we change, and as we change, we transform ourselves and the future simultaneously.

It *is* true that there is no solution, individual or otherwise, *in our society*.<sup>31</sup> But if we can only balance this rather depressing knowledge with an awareness of the radical metamorphoses we have experienced - in our consciousness and in our lives - the perhaps we can have the courage to continue to create what we DREAM is possible. Obviously, it is not easy to face daily oppression and still continue to hope. But *it is our only chance*. If we abandon hope (the ability to see connections, to dream the present into the future), then we have already lost. Hope is woman's most powerful revolutionary tool; it is what we give each other every time we share our lives, our work, and our love. It pulls us forward out of self-hatred, self-blame, and the fatalism which keeps us prisoners in separate cells. If we surrender to depression and despair now, we are accepting the inevitability of authoritarian politics and patriarchal domination ("Despair is the worst betrayal, the coldest seduction: to believe at last that the enemy will prevail."<sup>32</sup> Marge Piercy). We must not let our pain and anger fade into hopelessness or short-sighted semi-"solutions". Nothing we can do is enough, but on the other hand, those "small changes" we make in our minds, in our lives, in one another's lives, are not totally futile and ineffectual. It takes a long time to make a revolution: it is something that one both prepares for and lives now. The transformation of the future will not be instantaneous, but it can be *total*... a continuum of thought and action, individuality and collectivity, spontaneity and organization, stretching from what is to what can be.

Anarchism provides a framework for this transformation. It is a vision, a dream, a possibility which becomes "real" as we live it. Feminism is the connection that links anarchism to the future. When we finally see that connection clearly, when we hold to that vision, when we refuse to be raped of that HOPE, we will be stepping over the edge of nothingness into a being now just barely imaginable. The womanvision that is anarcho-feminism has been carried inside our women's bodies for centuries. "It will be an ongoing struggle in each of us, to birth this vision"<sup>33</sup> but *we must do it*. We must "ride our anger like elephants into battle".

*We are sleepwalkers troubled by nightmare flashes,  
In locked wards we closet our vision, renouncing ...  
Only when we break the mirror and climb into our vision,  
Only when we are the wind together streaming and singing,  
Only in the dream we become with our bones for spears,  
                    we are real at last  
                    and wake.*<sup>34</sup>

\*And, by self-fulfilling I mean not only in terms of survival needs (sufficient food, clothing, shelter. etc.) but psychological needs as well I (e.g., a non-oppressive environment which fosters total freedom of choice before specific, concretely possible alternatives).

## Footnotes

1. Emma Goldman, "**Anarchism: What It Really Stands For**", **Red Emma Speaks** (Vintage Books, 1972), p.59.
2. Su Negrin, **Begin at Start** (Times Change Press, 1972), p. 128.
3. Murray Bookchin, **On Spontaneity and Organization, Liberation**, March, 1972, p.6.
4. Paul Berman, **Quotations from the Anarchists** (Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 68.
5. Sam Doigoff, **The Anarchist Collectives** (Free Life Editions, 1974), p. 27.
6. Ibid, pp.6, 7, 85.
7. Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, **Obsolete Communism - The Left Wing Alternative** (McGraw-Hill, 1968), p.256.
8. See Murrey Bookchin's **Post Scarcity Anarchism** (Ramparts Press, 1974) for both an insightful analysis of the May-June events and a discussion of revolutionary potential in a technological society.
9. Ibid, p.262.
10. Ibid, p.250.
11. Bookchin, **On Spontaneity and Organization**, pp. 11-12.
12. Bookchin, **Post Scarcity Anarchism**, p.249.
13. Berman, p.146.
14. Bookchin, **Post Scarcity Anarchism**, p.40.
15. Bookchin, **On Spontaneity and Organization**, p.10.
16. Margaret Atwood, "**Song of the Worms**", **You Are Happy** (Harper & Row, 1974), p.35.
17. Mary Daly, **Beyond God the Father** (Beacon Press, 1973), p. 133.
18. Cathy Levine, "**The Tyranny of Tyranny**", **Black Rose 1**, p.56.
19. Temma Kaplan of the UCLA history department has done considerable research on women's anarchist groups (esp. "Mujeres Liberes") in the Spanish Revolution. See also Liz Willis, **Women in the Spanish Revolution**, Solidarity Pamphlet No. 48.
20. See Joreen's "**The Tyranny of Structurelessness**", **Second Wave**, Vol. 2, No. 1, and Cathy Levine's "**The Tyranny of Tyranny**", **Black Rose 1**.
21. Daly, p.55.
22. Robin Morgan, speech at Boston College, Boston, Mass., Nov., 1973.



23. Negrin, p.171.
24. Levine, p.50.
25. Doigoff, p. 19.
26. The Cohn-Bendits state that one major mistake in Paris 1968 was the failure to take complete control of the media, especially the radio and TV.
27. Goldman, "**Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice**", **Red Emma Speaks**, p.71.
28. Laurel, "**Towards a Woman Vision**", **Amazon Quarterly**, Vol. 1, Issue 2, p.40.
29. Daly, p.23.
30. Marge Piercy, "**Provocation of the Dream**".
31. Fran Taylor, "**A Depressing Discourse on Romance, the Individual Solution, and Related Misfortunes**", **Second Wave**, Vol. 3, No. 4.
32. Marge Piercy, "**Laying Down the Tower**", **To Be of Use** (Doubleday, 1973), p.88.
33. Laurel, p.40.
34. Piercy, "**Provocation of the Dream**".

## A Note On The Text

Peggy Kornegger was an editor of the American feminist magazine *The Second Wave*. *Anarchism: the Feminist Connection* first appeared as an article in the spring '75 issue of *Second Wave*. A further article by her, *Feminism, Anarchism and Economics* appeared in the summer/fall '76 issue.

# Voltairine deCleyre: An Introduction

Marian Leighton

The history of American radicalism requires much further in-depth exploration. This is particularly true of the American anarchist tradition. Ask an anarchist of today who he-she claims as radical intellectual forebears and, depending upon if he-she is of the left-wing or right-wing, they will reply Bakunin - Emma Goldman - Kropotkin or Benjamin Tucker - Josiah Warren - Lysander Spooner, respectively.

Interestingly, this reply would lead one to believe that right-wing anarchism is more indigenous a part of the American radical experience than left-wing anarchism which, based on the work of Bakunin, Goldman, Kropotkin, Berkman would seem more rooted in the nineteenth century European urban insurrectionary tradition. Is this in any way a fair distinction? Is it at all significant that the left-wing anarchist tradition intellectually seems to rely so heavily upon an imported radicalism that largely grew out of a European background? If this is true, does it matter in any way? Of course, it also remains to be seen just how much more "American" the right-wing or laissez-faire anarchist tradition is.

Motivation for interest in the above relationships has greater significance than an esoteric quibbling over historical antecedents. Nor do I pose the above questions on any chauvinistic assumption that a radical tradition that is "truly American" is superior to the "imported immigrant variety." However, more legitimately, the relationship of contemporary left-wing anarchism to an ongoing American radical historical experience could be important for sorting out the bases for appeal that may or may not exist between anarchism and various American subcultures other than those of anarchism's usual constituency of counter-culture youth and fairly sophisticated intellectual radicals. In addition to concern with "to whom and for what reasons does anarchism appeal", there is the larger question of accounting for the experiential roots of American anarchism.

Just how much is glib historical simplification in streamlining the relationship between left-wing anarchism and European anarchism and right-wing anarchism and American indigenous radicalism? After all the right-wing anarchists also emphasise their intellectual legacy from Adam Smith, Max Stirner, Nietzsche (as did Emma Goldman). and contemporarily the Russian-born Ayn Rand. Left-wing anarchists affirm their interest in the home-grown radicalism of Thoreau, Eugene Debs, Big Bill Haywood, and other Wobblies. The point remains, however, that the anarcho-capitalists can legitimately "capitalise" on the strain of individualism in native American radicalism. The left-wing anarchists, in contrast, were most active and perhaps most effective in this country during a period when the Marxist-scientific socialist analysis and organisational policies had obvious relevance to urban immigrants faced with the horrors of the expanding factory system.

The comparatively greater knowledge of left-wing anarchism during this particular period, the labour and unemployment agitation of the 1880's through the First World War, should be no surprise. This was also probably the period when anarchism reached the greatest number of Americans. The principal anarchist agitators of that time are those still most well-known to us today. However, this association of left-wing anarchism at its height to scientific socialism should not preclude investigation by contemporary anarchists into left-wing anarchist antecedents in America prior to the 1880's. Nor should we, as has so often been the case, allow the judgements of European socialists to distort our vision of many of the radical scenes in this country prior to the European socialist impact here, particularly the socialist anti-clericalism in looking at American religious radicalism, the oldest radical tradition in this country

Although I do not concur with the author in all of her evaluations, a good basic work to read on anarchism prior to the period of Anarcho-communist activity is Eunice Schuster's *Native American Anarchism: A Study of Left-wing Anarchist Individualism*. Schuster's main point, with which I agree, is that the demise of the left-wing anarchist individualist tradition is in large part owing to its non-class-conscious appeal at a time when the industrial-labour situation increasingly required self-conscious immigrant labour spokespeople and organisations. In spite of this limitation, native American anarchists, like the Anarcho-communists of European background, "assailed the same evils, but in a different manner, and aimed at the same theoretical objective, but proposed to arrive there by different routes," according to Schuster. She further believes there is a valid analogy to be made between Anne Hutchinson's judgement and expulsion at the hands of her Massachusetts Bay Colony inquisitors and the treatment which Emma Goldman suffered from the US government nearly three hundred years later.

The crucial period to consider in the relationship of the two main strands which create American anarchism, native American left-wing individualism and Anarcho-communism (later Anarcho-syndicalism), is the 1860's through the First World War. Not only was this the time of greatest immigrant labour activity and Anarcho-communist growth and agitation, but was also the scene of the left-wing anarchist individualist demise. Benjamin Tucker, probably the most important populariser of the tradition, left America in 1908 and never returned. The style of protest which he had known and many before him, that of stern ethical judgement and verbal protest and a course of withdrawal from and passive non-resistance to the unethical government, had been replaced by more active forms of protest, larger organised resistance, and direct actionism as a form of protest.

Certainly not all American left-wing anarchists left their homeland. Among those who stayed was Voltairine deCleyre. As a native American anarchist, her politics and ethical choices had been for the most part typical of those held by left-wing individualist anarchists of the period preceding great influence by European socialism. She was in her early anarchism both a pacifist and non-resistant, favouring individual solutions to social problems

During her early radical days she was a Free Thought lecturer stressing the rights of the individual against encroachment by larger social/political units. She relied for inspiration upon and was widely acquainted with the earlier American Republican ideals and their possible radical implications. Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson and their ideals furnished subjects for her free thought lecture.

She was thoroughly acquainted with notions of the rugged individualism of the American frontiersman and of the indomitable will of the individualist who would "move on" rather than allow his rights to be encroached upon by neighbours or politicians who didn't mind their own business. She was susceptible to the force of this image as part of the early American experience.

Even after her rejection of religion and her turning to free thought, her view of life was strongly tinged with a basic religious idealism, a belief that the long-suffering and compassionate individuals "will win out," having been supported against the evils of materialism, conformity, and apathy by the march of history. Consequently, a narrowly materialistic determination of the individual could never be compatible with Voltairine deCleyre's temperament and politics. Mere desire for material betterment would never be sufficient

motivation for the revolutionary, who must also basically be motivated by a devotion to a vision of life beyond the self.

Her choice of non-resistance as a form of protest is thoroughly American and very rooted in her religious ideology. "Non-resistance," refusal to pay unjust taxes, refusal to military induction, refusal to participate in electoral practices of corrupt governments is as American as apple pie and has been a traditional form of protest adopted by such native American radicals as Quakers, antinomians, transcendentalists, abolitionists, Shakers, and so many others. Underlying this stance is the belief that the Good Man is he who waits, who is passive, who will not respond in kind to the wickedness and tyranny of the Malevolent Man. Goodness is manifested in passivity.

Voltairine deCleyre's ideas on how radical social change can be effected were altered drastically during her lifetime, just as the "American System" itself was undergoing drastic transformation. The Haymarket Square legal atrocities and subsequent martyrdom of several anarchists not only outraged members of the immigrant labour population like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, but also outraged native American radicals who, as regards the needs of labour, had been bred in another age. Thus, as a result of the Haymarket incident, Voltairine deCleyre records her first recollection of total disillusionment with the "justice" of the American legal system.

With the passage of time, she came to feel that her emphasis upon the virtues of Americans bred in isolated, self-sustaining, independent pioneer communities had little relevance to an America whose trends in labour were directed toward construction of huge manufacturing conglomerates. This trend made evident the need for new radical solutions to the needs of labour. Concomitantly, she ceased to believe in the effectiveness of lecturing, as she had in her Free Thought days, on the virtues of the American Revolutionaries of 1776. In summary, she felt that during the American colonial and pioneer period, the harshness of making a life in a new land had fostered a kind of sectarian independence jealously guarded, that being thrown upon their own resources the settlers had been made into well-rounded and well-balanced individuals, and that this experience had also made strong such social bonds as existed in the comparative simplicity of their small communities.

But this old Golden Age had virtually disappeared and the new reality of America, she felt, was its huge manufacturing plants, and the terrifying and depersonalising experience of urban poverty and isolation. With good reason Voltairine deCleyre could testify to the latter realities in her role as English

teacher among the urban immigrant poor of Philadelphia. Amid material conditions of utter deprivation, she was forced to choose teaching as her only means of subsistence. (Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2, p. 504).

In her social activist vision of a transformed future, there was a constructive transition made in her thinking that mirrored her analysis of her country's changes. Voltairine deCleyre did not - as many individualist anarchists did and continue to do posit as a solution the restoration of that state of pioneer sovereign individuality. (Modern anarcho-capitalists behave as if they believed money, "running your own little capitalist enterprise", has the power of bringing back the golden days of the Great American Individual, as if the frontier had never disappeared.) Instead, she felt "...the great manufacturing plants will break up, population will go after the fragments, and there will be .seen not indeed the hard self-sustaining, isolated pioneer communities of early America, but thousands of small communities stretching along the lines of transportation, each producing very largely for its own needs, able to rely upon itself, and therefore able to be independent." (p. 134. *Selected Writings of Voltairine deCleyre*). Is this not similar in some respects to what many anarchists are now attempting by decentralising new technologies, alternate energy and food production systems to make smaller neighbourhood areas more nearly autonomous by means of co-operation among the neighbourhood residents? The result of her thinking, thus, pointed neither to resurrection of the ideal of isolated frontier individualism. nor to the faceless bureaucracy of State Socialism.

Toward the end of her life, Voltairine deCleyre came to accept "direct actionism" as a form of public protest, thus obviously revising her earlier stance of pacifist non-resistance. Even after her acceptance of direct actionism, Voltairine deCleyre, unlike Emma Goldman, could not approve of advising anyone to do anything "involving a risk to herself, " since each individual can only assume such great responsibility over their own lives ultimately; she nonetheless declared that the "spirit which animates Emma Goldman is the only one which will emancipate the slave from his slavery, the tyrant from his tyranny - the spirit which is willing to dare and suffer." (pp. 9-10, Hippolyte Havel's introduction to *Selected Writings of Voltairine deCleyre*) In 1894, with such words as the above, she greeted the unemployed of Philadelphia as stand-in for Emma Goldman who had been arrested a few hours earlier for her expropriation speech to unemployed New York workers the previous night. Thus, Voltairine deCleyre lent her support to the expropriation of private property, a far cry from the traditional individualist anarchist stance on the sanctity of private property.

In her ideals at least, Voltairine deCleyre made a constructive transition from a style of fairly narrow left-wing individualist anarchism to an anarchism more attuned to the evolving economic realities of an expanding industrial age. However, it would be false to assume that she made her way to an acceptance of what in her time was called Anarchist Communism, Bakuninist Anarchism.

Faith in individual awareness as the crucial factor in the moulding of the social/political/economic environment is, and always has been, a major emphasis in native American radicalism. Voltairine deCleyre was able to make the cognitive leap from the narrow, frontierist conception of individuality to an understanding of the breadth of individuality in its more complex social context, and thence to direct actionism and expropriative rights and their implications. However, it is significant that in her essay on her close friend and co-worker, Dyer D. Lum, who was largely responsible for convincing her of the correctness of direct actionism, she stresses his belief in transcendence as the most basic positive force in individual development, rather than his labour agitational activities. Her insistence that individual consciousness must accompany social development and change is a synthesis with no less validity for anarchists today. As Voltairine deCleyre affirmed: *The free and spontaneous inner life of the individual the Anarchists have regarded as the source of greatest pleasure and also of progress itself, or as some would prefer to say, social change.* (p. 186, *Selected Writings of Voltairine deCleyre*).

The following is taken from the *Selected Writings of Voltairine deCleyre*, edited by Alexander Berkman for Mother Earth Publishing in 1914.

## The Making of an Anarchist

by Voltairine deCleyre

"Here was one guard, and here was the other at this end; I was here opposite the gate. You know those problems in geometry of the hare and the hounds - they never run straight, but always in a curve, so, see? And the guard was no smarter than the dogs; if he had run straight he would have caught me."

It was Peter Kropotkin telling of his escape from the Petro-Paulovsky fortress. Three crumbs on the table marked the relative position of the outwitted guards and the fugitive prisoner; the speaker had broken them from the bread on which he was lunching and dropped them on the table with an amused grin. The suggested triangle had been the starting-point of the life-long exile of the greatest man, save Tolstoy alone, that Russia has produced: from that moment began the many foreign wanderings and the taking of the simple, love-given title "Comrade," for which he had abandoned the "Prince," which he despises.

We were three together in the plain little home of a London workingman - Will Wess, a one-time shoemaker - Kropotkin, and I. We had our "tea" in homely English fashion, with thin slices of buttered bread; and we talked of things nearest our hearts, which, whenever two or three Anarchists are gathered together, means present evidences of the growth of liberty and what our comrades are doing in all lands. And as what they do and say often leads them into prisons, the talk had naturally fallen upon Kropotkin's experience and his daring escape, for which the Russian government is chagrined unto this day

Presently the old man glanced at the time and jumped briskly to his feet: "I am late. Good-by, Voltairine; good-by, Will. Is this the way to the kitchen? I must say good-by to Mrs. Turner and Lizzie." And out to the kitchen he went, unwilling, late though he was, to leave without a hand-clasp to those who had so much as washed a dish for him. Such is Kropotkin, a man whose personality is felt more than any other in the Anarchist movement - at once the gentlest, the most kindly, and the most invincible of men. Communist as well as Anarchist, his very heart-beats are rhythmic with the great common pulse of work and life.

Communist am not I, though my father was, and his father before him during the stirring times of '48, which is probably the remote reason for my opposition to things as they are: at bottom convictions are mostly temperamental. And if I sought to explain myself on other grounds, I should be a bewildering error in logic; for by early influences and education I should have been a nun, and spent my life glorifying Authority in its most concentrated form, as some of my schoolmates are doing at this hour within the mission houses of the Order of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. But the old ancestral spirit of rebellion asserted itself while I was yet fourteen, a schoolgirl at the Convent of Our Lady of Lake Huron, at Sarnis, Ontario. How I pity myself now, when I remember it, poor lonesome little soul, battling solitary in the murk of religious superstition, unable to believe and yet in hourly fear of damnation, hot, savage, and eternal, if I do not instantly confess and profess! How well I recall the bitter energy



with which I repelled my teacher's enjoinder, when I told her that I did not wish to apologise for an adjudged fault, as I could not see that I had been wrong, and would not feel my words. "It is not necessary," said she, "that we should feel what we say, but it is always necessary that we obey our superiors." "I will not lie." I answered hotly, and at the same time trembled lest my disobedience had finally consigned me to torment!

I struggled my way out at last, and was a freethinker when I left the institution, three years later, though I had never seen a book or heard a word to help me in my loneliness. It had been like the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and there are white scars on my soul yet, where Ignorance and Superstition burnt me with their hell-fire in those stifling days. Am I blasphemous? It is their word, not mine. Beside that battle of my young days all others have been easy, for whatever was without, within my own Will was supreme. It has owed no allegiance, and never shall; it has moved steadily in one direction, the knowledge and the assertion of its own liberty, with all the responsibility falling thereon.

This, I am sure, is the ultimate reason for my acceptance of Anarchism, though the specific occasion which ripened tendencies to definition was the affair of 1886-87, when five innocent men were hanged in Chicago for the act of one guilty who still remains unknown. Till then I believed in the essential justice of the American law and trial by jury. After that I never could. The infamy of that trial has passed into history, and the question it awakened as to the possibility of justice under law has passed into clamorous crying across the world. With this question fighting for a hearing at a time when, young and ardent, all questions were pressing with a force which later life would in vain hear again, I chanced to hear a Paine Memorial Convention in an out-of-the-way corner of the earth among the mountains and the snow-drifts of Pennsylvania. I was a freethought lecturer at the time, and had spoken in the afternoon on the lifework of Paine; in the evening I sat in the audience to hear Clarence Darrow deliver an address on Socialism. It was my first introduction to any plan for bettering the condition of the working-classes which furnished some explanation of the course of economic development, I ran to it as one who has been turning about in darkness runs to the light. I smile now at how quickly I adopted the label "Socialist" and how quickly I cast it aside. Let no one follow my example; but I was young. Six weeks later I was punished for my rashness, when I attempted to argue for my faith with a little Russian Jew. named Mozersky, at a debating club in Pittsburgh. He was an Anarchist, and a bit of a Socrates. He questioned me into all kinds of holes, from which I extricated myself most awkwardly, only to flounder into others he had smilingly dug while I was getting out of the first ones. The necessity of a better foundation became apparent: hence began a course of study in the principles of sociology and of modern Socialism and Anarchism as presented in their regular journals. It was Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty*, the exponent of Individualist Anarchism, which

finally convinced me that "Liberty is not the Daughter but the Mother of Order." And though I no longer hold the particular economic gospel advocated by Tucker, the doctrine of Anarchism itself, as then conceived, has but broadened, deepened, and intensified itself with years.

To those unfamiliar with the movement, the various terms are confusing. Anarchism is, in truth, a sort of Protestantism, whose adherents are a unit in the great essential belief that all forms of external authority must disappear to be replaced by self-control only, but variously divided in our conception of the form of future society. Individualism supposes private property to be the cornerstone of personal freedom; asserts that such property should consist in the absolute possession of one's own product and of such share of the natural heritage of all as one may actually use. Communist-Anarchism, on the other hand, declares that such property is both unrealisable and undesirable; that the common possession and use of all the natural sources and means of social production can alone guarantee the individual against a recurrence of inequality and its attendants, government and slavery. My personal conviction is that both forms of society, as well as many intermediations, would, in the absence of government, be tried in various localities, according to the instincts and material condition of the people, but that well founded objections may be offered to both. Liberty and experiment alone can determine the best forms of society. Therefore I no longer label myself otherwise than as "Anarchist" simply.

I would not, however, have the world think that I am an "Anarchist by trade. " Outsiders have some very curious notions about us, one of them being that Anarchists never work. On the contrary, Anarchists are nearly always poor, and it is only, the rich who live without work. Not only this, but it is our belief that every healthy human being will, by the laws of his own activity choose to work, though certainly not as now, for at present there is little opportunity for one to find his true vocation. Thus I, who in freedom would have selected otherwise, am a teacher of language. Some twelve years since, being in Philadelphia and without employment, I accepted the proposition of a small group of Russian Jewish factory workers to form an evening class in the common English branches. I know well enough that behind the desire to help me to make a living lay the wish that I might thus take part in the propaganda of our common cause. But the incidental became once more the principal, and a teacher of working men and women I have remained from that day. In those twelve years that I have lived and loved and worked with foreign Jews I have taught over a thousand, and found them as a rule, the brightest, the most persistent and sacrificing students, and in youth dreamers of social ideals. While the " intelligent American" has been cursing him as the "ignorant foreigner," while the short-sighted working man has been making life for the "sheeny" as intolerable as possible, silent and patient the despised man has worked his way against it all. I have myself seen such genuine heroism in the

cause of education practised by girls and boys, and even by men and women with families, as would pass the limits of belief to the ordinary. Cold, starvation, self-isolation, all endured for years in order to obtain the means for study; and, worse than all, exhaustion of body even to emaciation - this is common. Yet in the midst of all this, so fervent is the ~ imagination of the young that most of them find time besides to visit the various clubs and societies where radical thought is discussed, and sooner or later ally themselves either with the Socialist Sections, the Liberal Leagues, the Single Tax Clubs, or the Anarchist Groups. The greatest Socialist daily in America is the Jewish *Vorwaerts*, and the most active and competent practical workers are Jews. So they are among the Anarchists. I am no propagandist at all costs, or I would leave the story here; but the truth compels me to add that as the years pass and the gradual filtration and absorption of successful professionals, the golden mist of enthusiasm vanishes, and the old teacher must turn for comradeship to the new youth, who still press forward with burning eyes, seeing what is lost forever to those whom common success has satisfied and stupefied. It brings tears sometimes, but as Kropotkin says, "Let them go; we have had the best of them." After all, who are the really old?

Those who wear out in faith and energy, and take to easy chairs and soft living; not Kropotkin, with his sixty years upon him, who has bright eyes and the eager interest of a little child; not fiery John Most, "the old warhorse of the revolution," unbroken after his ten years of imprisonment in Europe and America; not grey-haired Louise Michel, with the aurora of the morning still shining in her keen look which peers from behind the barred memories of New Caledonia ; not Dyer D. Lum, who still smiles in his grave, I think; nor Tucker, nor Turner, nor Theresa Clairmont, nor Jean Grave - not these. I have met them all, and felt the springing life pulsating through heart and hand, joyous, ardent, leaping into action. Not such are the old, but your young heart that goes bankrupt in social hope, dry-rotting in this stale and purposeless society. Would you always be young? Then be an Anarchist, and live with the faith of hope, though you be old. I doubt if any other hope has the power to keep the fire alight as I saw it in 1897, when we met the Spanish exiles released from the fortress of Montjuich. Comparatively few persons in America ever knew the story of that torture, though we distributed fifty thousand copies of the letters smuggled from the prison. and some few newspapers did reprint them. They were the letters of men incarcerated on mere suspicion for the crime of an unknown person, and subjected to tortures the bare mention of which makes one shudder. Their nails were torn out, their heads compressed in metal caps, the most sensitive portions of the body twisted between guitar strings, their flesh burned with red hot irons; they had been fed on salt codfish after days of starvation, and refused water; Juan One, a boy nineteen years old, had gone mad; another had confessed to something he had never done and knew nothing of. This is no horrible imagination. I who write have myself shaken some of those scarred hands. Indiscriminately, four hundred people of all sorts of beliefs - Republicans, trade unionists, Socialists, Free Masons, as well as Anarchists - had been cast into dungeons and tortured in the infamous "zero."

Is it a wonder that most of them came out Anarchists? There were twenty-eight in the first lot that we met at Euston Station that August afternoon, homeless wanderers in the whirlpool of London, released without trial after months of imprisonment, and ordered to leave Spain in forty-eight hours! They had left it, singing their prison songs; and still across their dark and sorrowful eyes one could see the eternal Maytime bloom. They drifted away to South America chiefly, where four or five new Anarchist papers have since arisen, and several colonising experiments along Anarchist lines are being tried. So tyranny defeats itself, and the exile becomes the seed-sower of the revolution.

And not only to the heretofore unaroused does he bring awakening, but the entire character of the world movement is modified by this circulation of the comrades of all nations among themselves. Originally the American movement, the native creation which arose with Josiah Warren in 1829. was purely individualist; the student of economy will easily understand the material and historical cause for such development. But within the last twenty years the communist idea has made great progress owing primarily to that concentration in capitalist production which has driven the American workingmen to grasp at the idea of solidarity, and, secondly, the expulsion of active communist propagandists from Europe. Again, another change has come within the last ten years. Til then the application of the idea was chiefly narrowed to industrial matters, and the economic schools mutually denounced each other; today a large and genial tolerance is growing. The young generation recognises the immense sweep of the idea through all the realms of art, science, literature, education, sex relations, and personal morality, as well as social economy, and welcomes the accession to the ranks of those who struggle to realise the free life, no matter in what field. For this is what Anarchism finally means, the whole unchaining of life after two thousand years of Christian asceticism and hypocrisy.

Apart from the question of ideals, there is the question of method. "How do you propose to get all this?" is the question most frequently asked us. The same modification has taken place here. Formerly there were "Quakers" and "Revolutionists"; so there are still. But while they neither thought well of the other, now both have learned that each has his own use in the great play of world forces. No man is in himself a unit, and in every soul Jove still makes war on Christ, Nevertheless, the spirit of Peace grows; and while it would be idle to say that Anarchists in general believe that any of the great industrial problems will be solved without the use of force it would be equally idle to suppose that they consider force itself a desirable thing, or that it furnishes a final solution to any problem, From peaceful experiment alone can come final solution, and that the advocates of force know and believe as well as the Tolstoyans. Only they think that the present tyrannies provoke resistance. The spread of Tolstoy's "War and Peace" and "The Slavery of Our Times," and the growth of numerous Tolstoy clubs having for their purpose the dissemination of the

literature of non-resistance, is an evidence that many receive the idea that it is easier to conquer war with peace. I am one of these. I can see no end of retaliation unless someone ceases to retaliate. But let no one mistake this for servile submission or meek abnegation; my right shall be asserted no matter at what cost to me, and none shall trench upon it without my protest.

Good-natured satirists often remark that "the best way to cure an Anarchist is to give him a fortune." Substituting "corrupt" for "cure," I would subscribe to this; and believing myself to be no better than the rest of men, I earnestly hope that as so far it has been my lot to work, and work hard, and for no fortune, so I may continue to the end; for let me keep the intensity of my soul, with all the limitations of my material conditions, rather than become the spineless and idealless creation of material needs. My reward is that I live with the young; I keep step with my comrades; I shall die in the harness with my face to the east - the East and the Light.

## A Note On The Text

Marian Leighton's introduction first appeared in issue 2 of the US anarchist journal *Black Rose* - sadly no longer published.

Voltairine deCleyres essay was published in *Selected Writings of Voltairine deCleyre* edited by Alex Berkman and published by Mother Earth Publishing in 1914. It's currently published by Revisionist Press, New York at the obscene price of \$60.

# Socialism, Anarchism And Feminism

## Carol Ehrlich

*You are a woman in a capitalist society. You get pissed off: about the job, about the bills, about your husband (or ex), about the kids' school, the housework, being pretty, not being pretty, being looked at, not being looked at (and either way, not listened to), etc. If you think about all these things and how they fit together and what has to be changed, and then you look around for some words to hold all these thoughts together in abbreviated form, you almost have to come up with 'socialist feminism.'*<sup>1</sup>

From all indications a great many women have "come up" with socialist feminism as the solution to the persistent problem of sexism. "Socialism" (in its astonishing variety of forms) is popular with a lot of people these days, because it has much to offer: concern for working people, a body of revolutionary theory that people can point to (whether or not they have read it), and some living examples of industrialised countries that are structured differently from the United States and its satellites.

For many feminists, socialism is attractive because it promises to end the economic inequality of working women. Further, for those women who believe that an exclusively feminist analysis is too narrow to encompass all the existing inequalities, socialism promises to broaden it, while guarding against the dilution of its radical perspective.

For good reasons, then, women are considering whether or not "socialist feminism" makes sense as a political theory. For socialist feminists do seem to be both sensible and radical - at least, most of them evidently feel a strong antipathy to some of the reformist and solipsistic traps into which increasing numbers of women seem to be stumbling.

To many of us more unromantic types, the Amazon Nation, with its armies of strong-limbed matriarchs riding into the sunset, is unreal, but harmless. A more serious matter is the current obsession with the Great Goddess and assorted other objects of worship, witchcraft, magic, and psychic phenomena. As a feminist concerned with transforming the structure of society, I find this anything but harmless.

Item One: Over fourteen hundred women went to Boston in April, 1976 to attend a women's spirituality conference dealing in large part with the above matters. Could not the energy invested in chanting, swapping the latest pagan ideas, and attending workshops on bellydancing and menstrual rituals have been put to some better and more feminist use?

Item Two: According to reports in at least one feminist newspaper, a group of witches tried to levitate Susan Saxe out of jail. If they honestly thought this would free Saxe, then they were totally out of touch with the realities of patriarchal oppression. If it was intended to be a light-hearted joke, then why isn't anyone laughing?

Reformism is a far greater danger to women's interests than are bizarre psychic games. I know that "reformist" is an epithet that may be used in ways that are neither honest nor very useful - principally to demonstrate one's ideological purity, or to say that concrete political work of any type is not worth doing because it is potentially co-optable. In response, some feminists have argued persuasively that the right kinds of reforms can build a radical movement.<sup>2</sup>

Just the same, there are reformist strategies that waste the energies of women, that raise expectations of great change, and that are misleading and alienating because they cannot deliver the goods. The best (or worst) example is electoral politics. Some socialists (beguiled by the notion of gradualism) fall for that one. Anarchists know better. You cannot liberate yourself by non-liberatory means; you cannot elect a new set of politicians (no matter how sisterly) to run the same old corrupt institutions - which in turn run *you*. When the National Organisation of Women (NOW)'s Majority Caucus - the radical branch of that organization - asks women to follow them "out of the mainstream, into the revolution" by means that include electoral politics, they will all drown in the depths of things as they are.

Electoral politics is an obvious, everyday kind of trap. Even a lot of non-radicals have learned to avoid it. A more subtle problem is capitalism in the guise of feminist economic power. Consider, for example, the Feminist Economic Network. The name might possibly fool you. Ostensibly it was a network of alternative businesses set up to erode capitalism from within by creating economic self-sufficiency for women. That is an appealing idea. Yet, FEN's first major project opened in Detroit in April, 1976. For an annual membership fee of \$100, privileged women could swim in a private pool, drink in a private bar, and get discounts in a cluster of boutiques. FEN paid its female employees \$2.50 per hour to work there. Its director, Laura Brown, announced this venture as "the beginning of the feminist economic revolution."<sup>3</sup>

When two of the same old games - electoral politics and hip capitalism - are labelled "revolution", the word has been turned inside out. It's not surprising that a socialist brand of feminism seems to be a source of revolutionary sanity to many women who don't want to be witches, primitive warriors, senators, or small capitalists, but who do want to end sexism while creating a transformed society. Anarchist feminism could provide a meaningful theoretical framework, but all too many feminists have either never heard of it, or else dismiss it as the ladies' auxiliary of male bomb-throwers.

Socialist feminism provides an assortment of political homes. On the one hand, there are the dingy, cramped quarters of Old Left sects such as the Revolutionary Communist Party (formerly the Revolutionary Union), the October League, and the International Workers Party. Very few women find these habitable. On the other hand, a fair number of women are moving into the sprawling, eclectic establishments built by newer Left groups such as the New American Movement, or by various autonomous "women's unions".

The newer socialist feminists have been running an energetic and reasonably effective campaign to recruit nonaligned women. In contrast, the more rigid Old Left groups have largely rejected the very idea that lesbians, separatists, and assorted other scruffy and unsuitable feminists could work with the noble inheritors of Marx, Trotsky (although the Trotskyists are unpredictable), Stalin, and Mao. Many reject the idea of an autonomous women's movement that cares at all about women's issues. To them, it is full of "bourgeois" (most damning of all Marxist epithets!) women bent on "doing their own thing", and it "divides the working class", which is a curious assumption that workers are dumber than everyone else. Some have a hysterical antipathy to lesbians: the most notorious groups are the October League and the Revolutionary Communist Party, but they are not alone. In this policy, as in so many others, the anti-lesbian line follows that of the communist countries. The RCP, for example, released a position paper in the early 1970s (back in its pre-party



days, when it was the plain old Revolutionary Union) which announced that homosexuals are "caught in the mire and muck of bourgeois decadence", and that gay liberation is "anti-working class and counter revolutionary". All the Old Left groups are uneasy with the idea that any women outside the "proletariat" are oppressed at all. The working class, of course, is a marvellously flexible concept: in the current debates on the Left, it ranges from point-of-production workers (full stop) to an enormous group that takes in every single person who sells her or his labor for wages, or who depends on someone else who does. That's almost all of us. (So, Papa Kari, if ninety per cent of the people of the United States are the vanguard, why haven't we had the revolution yet?)

The newer socialist feminists have been trying in all manner of inventive ways to keep a core of Marxist-Leninist thought, up-date it, and graft it to contemporary radical feminism. The results are sometimes peculiar. In July, 1975, the women of the New American Movement and a number of autonomous groups held the first national conference on socialist feminism. It was not especially heavily advertised in advance, and everyone seemed to be surprised that so many women (over sixteen hundred, with more turned away) wanted to spend the July 4th weekend in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

On reading the speeches given at the conference, as well as extensive commentary written by other women who attended,<sup>4</sup> it is not at all clear what the conference organizers thought they were offering in the name of "socialist feminism". The *Principles of Unity* that were drawn up prior to the conference included two items that have always been associated with radical feminism, and that in fact are typically thought of as *antithetical* to a socialist perspective. The first principle stated: "We recognize the need for and support the existence of the autonomous women's movement throughout the revolutionary process". The second read: "We agree that all oppression, whether based on race, class, sex, or lesbianism, is interrelated and the fights for liberation from oppression must be simultaneous and cooperative". The third principle merely remarked that "socialist feminism is a strategy for revolution"; and the fourth and final principle called for holding discussions "in the spirit of struggle and unity".

This is, of course, an incredible smorgasbord of tasty principles - a menu designed to appeal to practically everyone. But when "socialist" feminists serve up the independent women's movement as the main dish, and when they say class oppression is just one of several oppressions, no more important than any other, then (as its Marxist critics say) it is no longer socialism.

However, socialist feminists do not follow out the implications of radical feminism all the way. If they did, they would accept another principle: that non-hierarchical structures are essential to feminist practice. This, of course, is too much for any socialist to take. But what it means is that radical feminism is far more compatible with one type of anarchism than it is with socialism. That type is social anarchism (also known as communist anarchism), not the individualist or anarcho-capitalist varieties.

This won't come as news to feminists who are familiar with anarchist principles - but very few feminists are. That's understandable, since anarchism has veered between a bad press and none at all. If feminists were familiar with anarchism, they would not be looking very hard at socialism as a means of fighting sexist oppression. Feminists have got to be sceptical of any social theory that comes with a built-in set of leaders and followers, no matter how "democratic" this centralized structure is supposed to be. Women of all classes, races, and life circumstances have been on the receiving end of domination too long to want to exchange one set of masters for another. We know who has power and (with a few isolated exceptions) it isn't us.

Several contemporary anarchist feminists have pointed out the connections between social anarchism and radical feminism. Lynne Farrow said "feminism practices what anarchism preaches". Peggy Kornegger believes that "feminists have been unconscious anarchists in both theory and practice for years". And Marian Leighton states that "the refining distinction from radical feminist to anarcho-feminist is largely that of making a step in self-conscious theoretical development."<sup>5</sup>

*We build autonomy  
The process of ever growing synthesis  
For every living creature.  
We spread  
Spontaneity and creation  
We learn the joys of equality  
Of relationships  
Without dominance  
Among sisters.  
We destroy domination  
In all its forms.*

This chant appeared in the radical feminist newspaper *It Aint Me Babe*<sup>6</sup> whose masthead carried the line "end all hierarchies". It was not labelled an anarchist

(or anarchist feminist) newspaper, but the connections are striking. It exemplified much of what women's liberation was about in the early years of the reborn movement. And it is that spirit that will be lost if the socialist feminist hybrid takes root; if goddess worship or the lesbian nation convince women to set up new forms of dominance-submission.

## Radical Feminism and Anarchist Feminism

All radical feminists and all social anarchist feminists are concerned with a set of common issues: control over one's own body; alternatives to the nuclear family and to heterosexuality; new methods of child care that will liberate parents and children; economic self-determination; ending sex stereotyping in education, in the media, and in the workplace; the abolition of repressive laws; an end to male authority, ownership, and control over women; providing women with the means to develop skills and positive self-attitudes; an end to oppressive emotional relationships; and what the Situationists have called "the reinvention of everyday life".

There are, then, many issues on which radical feminists and anarchist feminists agree. But anarchist feminists are concerned with something more. Because they are anarchists, they work to end all power relationships, all situations in which people can oppress each other. Unlike some radical feminists who are not anarchists, they do not believe that power in the hands of women could possibly lead to a non-coercive society. And unlike most socialist feminists, they do not believe that anything good can come out of a mass movement with a leadership elite. In short, neither a workers' state nor a matriarchy will end the oppression of everyone. The goal, then, is not to "seize" power, as the socialists are fond of urging, but to abolish power.

Contrary to popular belief, all social anarchists are socialists. That is, they want to take wealth out of the hands of the few and redistribute it among all members of the community. And they believe that people need to co-operate with each other as a community, instead of living as isolated individuals. For anarchists, however, the central issues are always power and social hierarchy. If a state - even a state representing the workers - continues, it will re-establish forms of domination, and some people will no longer be free. People aren't free just because they are surviving, or even economically comfortable. They are free only when they have power over their own lives. Women, even more than most men, have very little power over their own lives. Gaining such autonomy, and insisting that everyone have it, is the major goal of anarchist feminists.

*Power to no one, and to every one: To each the power over his/her own life, and no others.*<sup>7</sup>

## On Practice

That is the theory. What about the practice? Again, radical feminism and anarchist feminism have much more in common than either does with socialist feminism.<sup>8</sup> Both work to build alternative institutions, and both take the politics of the personal very seriously. Socialist feminists are less inclined to think either is particularly vital to revolutionary practice.

Developing alternative forms of organization means building self-help clinics, instead of fighting to get one radical on a hospital's board of directors; it means women's video groups and newspapers, instead of commercial television and newspapers; living collectives, instead of isolated nuclear families; rape crisis centers; food co-ops; parent-controlled daycare centers; free schools; printing co-ops; alternative radio groups, and so on.

Yet, it does little good to build alternative institutions if their structures mimic the capitalist and hierarchical models with which we are so familiar. Many radical feminists recognized this early: That's why they worked to rearrange the way women perceive the world and themselves (through the consciousness-raising group), and why they worked to rearrange the forms of work relationships and interpersonal interactions (through the small, leaderless groups where tasks are rotated and skills and knowledge shared). They were attempting to do this in a hierarchical society that provides no models except ones of inequality. Surely, a knowledge of anarchist theory and models of organization would have helped. Equipped with this knowledge, radical feminists might have avoided some of the mistakes they made - and might have been better able to overcome some of the difficulties they encountered in trying simultaneously to transform themselves and society.

Take, for example, the still current debate over "strong women" and the closely related issue of leadership. The radical feminist position can be summarized this way:

1. Women have been kept down because they are isolated from each other and are paired off with men in relationships of dominance and submission.
2. Men will not liberate women; women must liberate themselves. This cannot happen if each woman tries to liberate herself alone. Thus, women must work together on a model of mutual aid.
3. "Sisterhood is powerful", but women cannot be sisters if they recapitulate masculine patterns of dominance and submission.
4. New organizational forms have to be developed. The primary form is the small leaderless group; the most important behaviors are egalitarianism, mutual support, and the sharing of skills and knowledge.

If many women accepted this, even more did not. Some were opposed from the start; others saw first hand that it was difficult to put into practice, and regretfully concluded that such beautiful idealism would never work out.

Ideological support for those who rejected the principles put forth by the "unconscious anarchists" was provided in two documents that quickly circulated through women's liberation newspapers and organisations. The first was Anselma dell'Olio's speech to the second Congress to Unite Women, which was held in May, 1970 in New York City. The speech, entitled *Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women's Movement: A Letter of Resignation*, gave dell'Olio's reasons for leaving the women's movement. The second document was Joreen's *Tyranny of Structurelessness*, which first appeared in 1972 in *The Second Wave*. Both raised issues of organizational and personal practice that were, and still are, tremendously important to the women's movement.

*"I have come to announce my swan-song to the women's movement... I have been destroyed... I learned three and one-half years ago that women had always been divided against one another, were self-destructive and filled with impotent rage. I never dreamed that I would see the day when this rage, masquerading as a pseudo-egalitarian radicalism under the "pro-woman" banner, would turn into frighteningly vicious anti-intellectual fascism of the Left, and used within the movement to strike down sisters singled out with all the subtlety and justice of a kangaroo court of the Ku Klux Klan. I am referring, of course, to the personal attack, both overt and odious, to which women in the movement, who have painfully managed any degree of achievement, have been subjected... If you are... an achiever you are immediately labelled a thrill-seeking opportunist, a ruthless mercenary, out to get her fame and fortune over the dead bodies of selfless sisters who have buried their abilities and sacrificed their ambitions for the greater*

*glory of Feminism... If you have the misfortune of being outspoken and articulate, you are accused of being power-mad, elitist, racist, and finally the worst epithet of all: a MALE IDENTIFIER.*<sup>9</sup>

When Anselma dell'Olio gave this angry farewell to the movement, it did two things: For some women, it raised the question of how women can end unequal power relationships among themselves without destroying each other. For others, it did quite the opposite - it provided easy justification for all the women who had been dominating other women in a most unsisterly way. Anyone who was involved in women's liberation at that time knows that the dell'Olio statement was twisted by some women in exactly that fashion: Call yourself assertive, or strong, or talented, and you can re-label a good deal of ugly, insensitive, and oppressive behavior. Women who presented themselves as tragic heroines destroyed by their envious or misguided (and, of course, far less talented) "sisters" could count on a sympathetic response from some other women.

Just the same, women who were involved in the movement at that time know that the kinds of things dell'Olio spoke about *did* happen, and they should not have happened. A knowledge of anarchist theory is not enough, of course, to prevent indiscriminate attacks on women. But in the struggle to learn new ways of relating and working with each other, such knowledge might - just might - have prevented some of these destructive mistakes.

Ironically, these mistakes were motivated by the radical feminist aversion to conventional forms of power, and the inhuman personal relationships that result from one set of persons having power over others. When radical feminists and anarchist feminists speak of abolishing power, they mean to get rid of all institutions, all forms of socialisation, all the ways in which people coerce each other - and acquiesce to being coerced.

A major problem arose in defining the nature of coercion in the women's movement. The hostility towards the "strong" woman arose because she was someone who could at least potentially coerce women who were less articulate, less self-confident, less assertive than she. Coercion is usually far more subtle than physical force or economic sanction. One person can coerce another without taking away their job, or striking them, or throwing them in jail.

Strong women started out with a tremendous advantage. Often they knew more. Certainly they had long since overcome the crippling socialisation that stressed passive, timid, docile, conformist behavior - behavior that taught women to smile when they weren't amused, to whisper when they felt like shouting, to lower their eyes when someone stared aggressively at them. Strong women weren't terrified of speaking in public; they weren't afraid to take on "male" tasks, or to try something new. Or so it seemed.

Put a "strong" woman in the same small group with a "weak" one, and she becomes a problem: How does she not dominate? How does she share her hard-earned skills and confidence with her sister? From the other side - how does the "weak" woman learn to act in her own behalf? How can one even conceive of "mutual" aid in a one-way situation? Of "sisterhood" when the "weak" member does not feel equal to the "strong" one?

These are complicated questions, with no simple answers. Perhaps the closest we can come is with the anarchist slogan, "a strong people needs no leaders". Those of us who have learned to survive by dominating others, as well as those of us who have learned to survive by accepting domination, need to resocialize ourselves into being strong without playing dominance-submission games, into controlling what happens to us without controlling others. This can't be done by electing the right people to office or by following the correct party line; nor can it be done by sitting and reflecting on our sins. We rebuild ourselves and our world through activity, through partial successes, and failure, and more partial successes. And all the while we grow stronger and more self-reliant.

If Anselma dell'Olio criticised the personal practice of radical feminists, Joreen raised some hard questions about organisational structure. *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*<sup>10</sup> pointed out that there is no such thing as a "structureless" group, and people who claim there is are fooling themselves. All groups have a structure; the difference is whether or not the structure is explicit. If it is implicit, hidden elites are certain to exist and to control the group - and everyone, both the leaders and the led, will deny or be confused by the control that exists. This is the "tyranny" of structurelessness. To overcome it, groups need to set up open, explicit structures accountable to the membership.

Any anarchist feminist, I think, would agree with her analysis - up to this point, and no further. For what Joreen also said was that the so-called "leaderless, structureless group" was incapable of going beyond talk to action. Not only its lack of open structure, but also its small size and its emphasis upon consciousness-raising (talk) were bound to make it ineffective.

Joreen did not say that women's groups should be hierarchically structured. In fact, she called for leadership that would be "diffuse, flexible, open, and temporary"; for organizations that would build in accountability, diffusion of power among the maximum number of persons, task rotation, skill-sharing, and the spread of information and resources. All good social anarchist principles of organization! But her denigration of consciousness-raising and her preference for large regional and national organizations were strictly part of the old way of doing things, and implicitly accepted the continuation of hierarchical structures.

Large groups are organized so that power and decision-making are delegated to a few - unless, of course, one is speaking of a horizontally coordinated network of small collectives, which she did not mention. How does a group such as NOW, with its sixty thousand members in 1975, rotate tasks, share skills, and ensure that all information and resources are available to everyone? It can't, of course. Such groups have a president, and a board of directors, and a national office, and a membership - some of whom are in local chapters, and some of whom are isolated members. Few such groups have very much direct democracy, and few teach their members new ways of working and relating to one another.

The unfortunate effect of *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* was that it linked together large organization, formal structure, and successful direct action in a way that seemed to make sense to a lot of people. Many women felt that in order to fight societal oppression a large organization was essential, and the larger the better. The image is strength pitted against strength: You do not kill an elephant with an air gun, and you do not bring down the patriarchal state with the small group. For women who accept the argument that greater size is linked to greater effectiveness, the organizational options seem limited to large liberal groups such as NOW or to socialist organizations which are mass organizations.

As with so many things that seem to make sense, the logic is faulty. "Societal oppression" is a reification, an over-blown, paralysing, made-up entity that is large mainly in the sense that the same oppressions happen to a lot of us. But oppressions, no matter how pervasive, how predictable, almost always are done to us by some one - even if that person is acting as an agent of the state, or as a member of the dominant race, gender, or class. The massive police assaults upon our assembled forces are few; even the police officer or the boss or the husband who is carrying out his allotted sexist or authoritarian role intersects with us at a given point in our everyday lives. Institutionalized



oppression does exist, on a large scale, but it seldom needs to be attacked (indeed, seldom can be attacked) by a large group. Guerilla tactics by a small group - occasionally even by a single individual - will do very nicely in retaliation.

Another unfortunate effect of the *Tyranny of Structurelessness* mentality (if not directly of the article) was that it fed people's stereotypes of anarchists. (Of course, people don't usually swallow something unless they're hungry.) Social anarchists aren't opposed to structure: They aren't even against leadership, provided that it carries no reward or privilege, and is temporary and specific to a particular task. However, anarchists, who want to abolish a *hierarchical* structure, are almost always stereotyped as wanting no structure at all. Unfortunately, the picture of a gaggle of disorganized, chaotic anarchist women, drifting without direction, caught on. For example, in 1976 *Quest* reprinted an edited transcript of an interview which Charlott Bunch and Beverly Fisher had given the Feminist Radio Network in 1972. In one way, the most interesting thing about the interview was that the *Quest* editors felt the issues were still so timely in 1976.<sup>11</sup> ("We see the same trashing of leaders and glorification of structurelessness that existed five years ago." (p. 13) ). But what Bunch had to say at that time was also extremely interesting: According to her, the emphasis on solving problems of structure and leadership was "a very strong anarchist desire. It was a good desire, but it was an unrealistic one" (p. 4). Anarchists, who are used to being called "unrealistic", will note that the unreality of it all apparently lay in the problems which the women's movement was having in organizing itself - problems of hidden leadership, of having "leaders" imposed by the media, of difficulty in reaching out to interested but uncommitted women, of over representation of middle class women with lots of time on their hands, of the amorphousness of the movement, of the scarcity of specific task groups which women could join, of hostility towards women who tried to show leadership or initiative. A heavy indictment! Yet, these very real problems were not caused by anarchism, nor will they be cured by doses of of vanguardism or reformism. And by labelling these organizational difficulties "anarchist" feminists ignore a rich anarchist tradition while at the same time proposing solutions that are - although they apparently don't know it - anarchist. Bunch and Fisher laid out a model of leadership in which everyone participates in making decisions; and leadership is specific to a particular situation and is time-limited. Fisher criticized NOW for "hierarchical leadership that is not responsible to the vast membership" (p. 9), and Bunch stated, "leadership is people taking the initiative, carrying things through, having the ideas and imagination to get something started, and exhibiting particular skills in different areas" (p. 8). How do they suggest we prevent the silencing of these women under false notions of egalitarianism? "The only way women will stop putting down women who are strong is if they are strong themselves" (p. 12). Or, as I said earlier, a strong people needs no leaders. Right on!

## Situationism and Anarchist Feminism

*To transform the world and to change the structure of life are one and the same thing.*<sup>12</sup>

*The personal is the political.*<sup>13</sup>

Anarchists are used to hearing that they lack a theory that would help in building a new society. At best, their detractors say patronizingly, anarchism tells us what not to do. Don't permit bureaucracy or hierarchical authority; don't let a vanguard party make decisions; don't tread on me. Don't tread on anyone. According to this perspective, anarchism is not a theory at all. It is a set of cautionary practices, the voices of libertarian conscience - always idealistic, sometimes a bit truculent, occasionally anachronistic, but a necessary reminder.

There is more than a kernel of truth to this objection. Just the same, there are varieties of anarchist thought that can provide a theoretical framework for analysis of the world and action to change it. For radical feminists who want to take that "step in self-conscious theoretical development",<sup>14</sup> perhaps the greatest potential lies in Situationism.

The value of Situationism for an anarchist feminist analysis is that it combines a socialist awareness of the primacy of capitalist oppression with an anarchist emphasis upon transforming the whole of public and private life. The point about capitalist oppression is important: All too often anarchists seem to be unaware that this economic system exploits most people. But all too often socialist - especially Marxists - are blind to the fact that people are oppressed in every aspect of life: work, what passes for leisure, culture, personal relationships - all of it. And only anarchists insist that people must transform the conditions of their lives *themselves* - it cannot be done for them. Not by the party, not by the union, not by "organizers", not by anyone else.

Two basic Situationist concepts are "commodity" and "spectacle". Capitalism has made all of social relations commodity relations: The market rules all. People are not only producers and consumers in the narrow economic sense, but the very structure of their daily lives is based on commodity relations.

Society "is consumed as a *whole* - the ensemble of social relationships and structures is the central product of the commodity economy".<sup>15</sup> This has inevitably alienated people from their lives, not just from their labor; to consume social relationships makes one a passive spectator in one's life. The *spectacle*, then, is the culture that springs from the commodity economy - the stage is set, the action unfolds, we applaud when we think we are happy, we yawn when we think we are bored, but we cannot leave the show, because there is no world outside the theater for us to go to.

In recent times, however, the societal stage has begun to crumble, and so the possibility exists of constructing another world outside the theater - this time, a real world, one in which each of us directly participates as subject, not as object. The situationist phrase for this possibility is "the reinvention of everyday life".

How is daily life to be reinvested? By creating situations that disrupt what seems to be the natural order of things - situations that jolt people out of customary ways of thinking and behaving. Only then will they be able to act, to destroy the manufactured spectacle and the commodity economy - that is, capitalism in all its forms. Only then will they be able to create free and unalienated lives.

The congruence of this activist, social anarchist theory with radical feminist theory is striking. The concepts of commodity and spectacle are especially applicable to the lives of women. In fact, many radical feminists have described these in detail, without placing them in the Situationist framework.<sup>16</sup> To do so broadens the analysis, by showing women's situation as an organic part of the society as a whole, but at the same time without playing socialist reductionist games. Women's oppression is part of the over-all oppression of people by a capitalist economy, but it is not less than the oppression of others. Nor - from a Situationist perspective - do you have to be a particular variety of woman to be oppressed; you do not have to be part of the proletariat, either literally, as an industrial worker, or metaphorically, as someone who is not independently wealthy. You do not have to wait breathlessly for socialist feminist manifestoes to tell you that you qualify - as a housewife (reproducing the next generation of workers), as a clerical worker, as a student or a middle-level professional employed by the state (and therefore as part of the "new working class"). You do not have to be part of the Third World, or a lesbian, or elderly, or a welfare recipient. All of these women are objects in the commodity economy; all are passive viewers of the - spectacle. Obviously, women in some situations are far worse off than are others. But, at the same time, none are free in every area of their lives.

## Women and the Commodity Economy

Women have a dual relationship to the commodity economy - they are both consumers and consumed. As housewives, they are consumers of household goods purchased with money not their own, because not "earned" by them. This may give them a certain amount of purchasing power, but very little power over any aspect of their lives. As young, single heterosexuals, women are purchasers of goods designed to make them bring a high price on the marriage market. As anything else - lesbians, or elderly single, or self-sufficient women with "careers", women's relationship to the marketplace as consumers is not so sharply defined. They are expected to buy (and the more affluent they are, the more they are expected to buy), but for some categories of women, buying is not defined primarily to fill out some aspect of a woman's role.

So what else is new? Isn't the idea of woman-as-passive-consumer, manipulated by the media, patronized by slick Madison Avenue men, an overdone movement cliché? Well, yes - and no. A Situationist analysis ties consumption of economic goods to consumption of *ideological* goods, and then tells us to create situations (guerrilla actions on many levels) that will break that pattern of socialised acceptance of the world as it is. No guilt-tripping; no criticizing women who have "bought" the consumer perspective. For they have indeed *bought* it: It has been sold to them as a way of survival from the earliest moments of life. Buy this: It will make you beautiful and lovable. Buy *this*: It will keep your family in good health. Feel depressed? Treat yourself to an afternoon at the beauty parlor or to a new dress.

Guilt leads to inaction. Only action, to *re-invent* the everyday and make it something else, will change social relations.

### ***The Gift***

*Thinking she was the gift  
they began to package it early.  
they waxed its smile  
they lowered its eyes  
they tuned its ears to the telephone  
they curled its hair  
they straightened its teeth  
they taught it to bury its wishbone  
they poured honey down its throat*

*they made it say yes yes and yes  
they sat on its thumbs  
That box has my name on it,  
said the man. It's for me.  
And they were not surprised.  
While they blew kisses and winked  
he took it home. He put it on a table  
where his friends could examine it  
saying dance saying faster.  
He plunged its tunnel  
he burned his name deeper.  
Later he put it on a platform  
under the Klieg lights  
saying push saying harder  
saying just what I wanted  
you've given me a son.*

Carole Oles<sup>17</sup>

Women are not only consumers in the commodity economy; they are consumed as commodities. This is what Oles' poem is about, and it is what Tax has labelled "female schizophrenia". Tax constructs an inner monologue for the housewife-as-commodity: "I am nothing when I am by myself. In myself, I am nothing. I only know that I exist because I am needed by someone who is real, my husband, and by my children".<sup>18</sup>

When feminists describe socialisation into the female sex role, when they point out the traits female children are taught (emotional dependence, childishness, timidity, concern with being beautiful, docility, passivity, and so on), they are talking about the careful production of a commodity - although it isn't usually called that. When they describe the oppresiveness of sexual objectification, or of living in the nuclear family, or of being a Supermother, or of working in the kinds of low-level, underpaid jobs that most women find in the paid labour force, they are also describing woman as commodity. Women are consumed by men who treat them as sex objects; they are consumed by their children (whom they have produced!) when they buy the role of the Supermother; they are consumed by authoritarian husbands who expect them to be submissive servants; and they are consumed by bosses who bring them in and out of the labor force and who extract a maximum of labor for a minimum of pay. They are consumed by medical researchers who try out new and unsafe contraceptives on them. They are consumed by men who buy their bodies on the street. They are consumed by church and state, who expect them to produce the next generation for the glory of god and country; they are consumed by political and social organizations that expect them to "volunteer"

their time and energy. They have little sense of self, because their selfhood has been sold to others.

## Women and the Spectacle

It is difficult to consume people who put up a fight, who resist the cannibalizing of their bodies, their minds, their daily lives. A few people manage to resist, but most don't resist effectively, because they can't. It is hard to locate our tormentor, because it is so pervasive, so familiar. We have known it all our lives. It is our culture.

Situationists characterize our culture as a *spectacle*. The spectacle treats us all as passive spectators of what we are told are our lives. And the culture-as-spectacle covers everything: We are born into it, socialised by it, go to school in it, work and relax and relate to other people in it. Even when we rebel against it, the rebellion is often defined by the spectacle. Would anyone care to estimate the number of sensitive, alienated adolescent males who a generation ago modelled their behavior on James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*? I'm talking about a *movie*, whose capitalist producers and whose star made a great deal of money from this Spectacular.

Rebellious acts, then tend to be acts of *opposition* to the spectacle, but seldom are so different that they *transcend* the spectacle. Women have a set of behaviors that show dissatisfaction by being the opposite of what is expected. At the same time these acts are clichés of rebellion, and thus are almost prescribed safety valves that don't alter the theater of our lives. What is a rebellious woman supposed to do? We can all name the behaviors - they appear in every newspaper, on prime time television, on the best-seller list, in popular magazines - and, of course, in everyday life. In a setting that values perfectionist housekeeping, she can be a slob; in a subculture that values large families, she can refuse to have children. Other predictable insurgencies? She can defy the sexual double standard for married women by having an affair (or several); she can drink; or use what is termed "locker room" language; or have a nervous breakdown; or - if she is an adolescent - she can "act out" (a revealing phrase!) by running away from home and having sex with a lot of men.

Any of these things may make an individual woman's life more tolerable (often, they make it less so); and all of them are guaranteed to make conservatives

rant that society is crumbling. But these kinds of scripted insurrections haven't made it crumble yet, and, by themselves, they aren't likely to. Anything less than a direct attack upon all the conditions of our lives is not enough.

When women talk about changing destructive sex role socialisation of females, they pick one of three possible solutions: (a) girls should be socialised more or less like boys to be independent, competitive, aggressive, and so forth. In short, it is a man's world, so a woman who wants to fit in has to be "one of the boys". (b) We should glorify the female role, and realise that what we have called weakness is really strength. We should be proud that we are maternal, nurturant, sensitive, emotional, and so on. (c) The only healthy person is an androgynous person: We must eradicate the artificial division of humanity into "masculine" and "feminine", and help both sexes become a mix of the best traits of each.

Within these three models, personal solutions to problems of sexist oppression cover a wide range: Stay single; live communally (with both men and women, or with women only). Don't have children; don't have male children; have any kind of children you want, but get parent and worker-controlled child care. Get a job; get a better job; push for affirmative action. Be an informed consumer; file a lawsuit; learn karate; take assertiveness training. Develop the lesbian within you. Develop your proletarian identity. All of these make sense in particular situations, for particular women. But all of them are partial solutions to much broader problems, and none of them necessarily require seeing the world in a qualitatively different way.

So, we move from the particular to more general solutions. Destroy capitalism. End patriarchy. Smash heterosexism. All are obviously essential tasks in the building of a new and truly human world. Marxists, other socialists, social anarchists, feminists - all would agree. But what the socialist, and even some feminists, leave out is this: We must smash all forms of domination. That's not just a slogan, and it is the hardest task of all. It means that we have to see through the spectacle, destroy the stage sets, know that there are other ways of doing things. It means that we have to do more than react in programmed rebellions - we must act. And our actions will be collectively taken, while each person acts autonomously. Does that seem contradictory? It isn't - but it will be very difficult to do. The individual cannot change anything very much; for that reason, we have to work together. But that work must be without leaders as we know them, and without delegating any control over what we do and what we want to build.

Can the socialists do that? Or the matriarchs? Or the spirituality-trippers? You know the answer to that. Work with them when it makes sense to do so, but give up nothing. Concede nothing to them, or to anyone else.

*The past leads to us if we force it to.  
Otherwise it contains us  
in its asylum with no gates.  
We make history or it  
makes us.*<sup>19</sup>

## Footnotes

1. Barbara Ehrenreich, "What is Socialist Feminism?", *Win Magazine*, June 3, 1976, p.4.
2. The best of these arguments I've encountered are "Socialist Feminism; A Strategy for the Women's Movement", by the Hyde Park Chapter, Chicago Women's Liberation Union, 1972; and Charlotte Bunch, "The Reform Tool Kit", *Quest*, 1:1, Summer 1974, pp.37-51.
3. Reports by Polly Anna, Kana Trueblood, C. Corday and S. Tufts, *The Fifth Estate*, May, 1976, pp. 13, 16. The "revolution" failed: FEN and its club shut down.
4. People who are interested in reading reports of the conference will find them in almost every feminist or socialist newspaper that appeared in the month or so after July 4th. Speeches by Barbara Ehrenreich, Michelle Russell, and the Berkeley-Oakland Women's Union are reprinted in *Socialist Revolution*, No. 26, October-December 1975; and the speech by Charlotte Bunch, "Not for Lesbians Only", appears in *Quest*, 2:2, Fall 1975. A thirty-minute audiotape documentary is available from the Great Atlantic Radio Conspiracy, 2743 Maryland Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21218.
5. Farrow, "Feminism as Anarchism", *Aurora*, 4, 1974, p.9; Kornegger, "Anarchism: The Feminist Connection", *Second Wave*, 4: 1, Spring 1975, p.31; Leighton, "Anarcho-Feminism and Louise Michel", *Black Rose*, 1, April 1974, p. 14.
6. December, 1, 1970, p.11.
7. Lilith's Manifesto, from the Women's Majority Union of Seattle, 1969. Reprinted in Robin Morgan (ed.), *Sisterhood is Powerful*. N.Y.: Random House, 1970, p.529.
8. The best and most detailed description of the parallels between radical feminism and anarchist feminism is found in Kornegger, op cit.
9. The speech is currently available from KNOW, Inc.
10. *The Second Wave*, 2:1, 1972.
11. "What Future for Leadership?", *Quest*, 2:4, Spring 1976, pp.2-13.



12.       Strasbourg Situationists, *Once the Universities Were Respected*, 1968, p.38.
13.       Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political", *Notes from the Second Year*. N.Y.: Radical Feminism, 1970, pp. 76-78.
14.       Leighton, op cit.
15.       Point-Blank!, "The Changing of the Guard", in *Point-Blank*, October 1972, p.16.
16.       For one of the most illuminating of these early analyses, see Meredith Tax, "Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Everyday Life", Boston: Bread and Roses Publication, 1970.
17.       Carole Oles, "The Gift", in *13th Moon*, II: 1, 1974, p. 39.
18.       Tax, op cit., p. 13.
19.       Marge Piercy, excerpt from "Contribution to Our Museum", in *Living in the Open*. N.Y.: Knopf, 1976, pp.74-75.

## A Note On The Text

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